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WEAVERS AND FREEMEN IN COVENTRY, 1820-1861:

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL TRADITIONALISM IN AN EARLY VICTORIAN TOWN

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Thesis submitted to the University of Warwick for the degree of Ph.D., 1972

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April 1972. P.S.

Note on abbreviations used in the text:

C.R.O.: Coventry City Record Office.

C.W.C.: Coventry and Warwickshire in the Coventry City Library.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned with Coventry from about 1820 to 1861, and in particular with the social and political attitudes that characterised it. The dominant industry in the city and the area of Warwickshire to the north was the weaving of silk ribbons. They were usually made in domestic workshops, often by family labour; piecework rates by a standard 'list' were the traditional method of payment. A chronic surplus of labour threatened to disrupt the list-system and depress earnings. Before 1835 the list-system was several times generally abandoned; moreover, each successive list was lower than the last, and real earnings fell more rapidly than prices for those continuing on the same type of loom. On the other hand, many weavers turned to more productive looms and so increased their earnings. The home market for ribbons expanded, Warwickshire had little competition from other domestic producers, and much continental competition was effectively excluded by the statutory prohibition of imports until 1826. Although the tariff that then replaced it proved an inadequate barrier against continental producers between 1828 and 1832 - and those years were disastrous for Coventry as a result - it did suffice to guard and preserve for Warwickshire a growing market for cheap ribbons from the early 1830s onwards. Standard prices were not lowered after 1835, and were generally abandoned only once, from 1840 to 1842; the continued adoption of more productive looms further increased earnings.

Throughout the period, there was a strong tradition of support for the list system from 'honourable' manufacturers and citizens at large, anxious for the prosperity of the weavers and the town itself. The same tradition sustained a lavish system of statutory poor relief until 1830; and though it became more frugal thereafter, the fortunate exemption of Coventry from the close control of the Poor Law Commission until 1844, owing to the autonomy conferred by a local act, helped to preserve outdoor relief for the unemployed. At times of distress relief funds were collected: but a far greater amount of money was disbursed to the poor from the dole charities, with which the city was exceptionally well endowed. Some charities were a special preserve of the city's freemen, who also enjoyed rights of pasture on land near the city. The freemen, a large and

growing group, were determined to retain their privileges or convert them into rights as substantial. With the city's assistance or acquiescence, they did so.

Many weavers were freemen. Their common good fortune helped to create complaisance and a pervasive moderation of conduct. Although the city had a popular electorate because of its freeman franchise, it was never predominantly radical; radical electors had to coalesce with moderate liberals to return their candidates. Radical movements that disavowed middle-class prescriptions were numerically weak: and even these minorities were distinguished by their constitutionality. There were scarcely any violent clashes with authority. Industrially, the record is similar: of militant yet disciplined conduct. Even in the one act of Luddism that occurred there was little violence to person.

The weavers were always characterised by a preference for the outwork system. Steam factories were few in Coventry until the 1850s. They then threatened through superior productivity to displace the outwork system. The outdoor weavers competed with them by the installation of larger looms in their domestic topshops: and then, in a movement in which they were supported by the factory weavers and the city, compelled upon the factory proprietors a system of remuneration which removed the superior productivity of their looms. By 1859 the outwork system seemed more secure than ever. But the free trade measures of 1860, by removing the tariff which had long shielded the city, led to an influx of continental ribbons, a great excess of labour in Coventry, and the end of both support for the weavers from the city - now mindful of the need to cheapen labour-costs - and also the list-system which paternalism had long sustained.

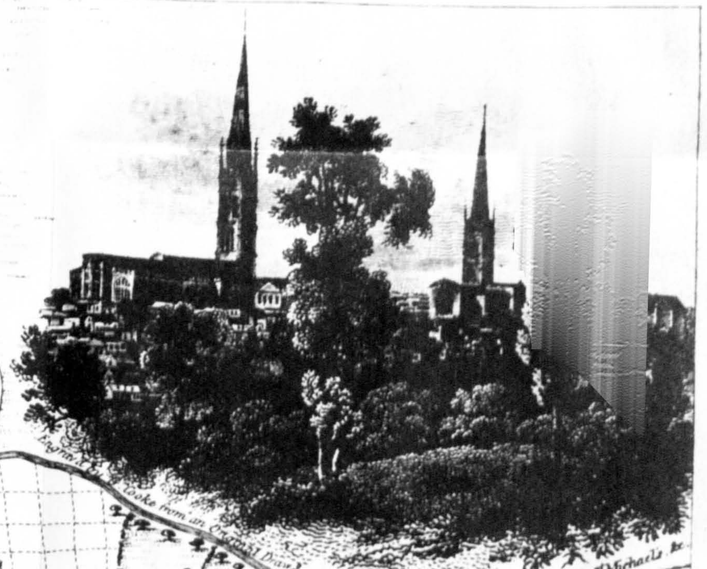
INTRODUCTION

At the end of the Napoleonic Wars, a traveller approaching Coventry along the old road from Birmingham would have ridden among fields till Spon End. From there a continuous line of narrow streets forming the main axis of the town stretched for little more than a mile, until fields took over once more in Far Gosford Street, the road to Leicester, on the far side of the Sherbourne. The route from Warwick to Nuneaton crossed this axis at what is still the centre of the city - the junction of High Street and Broadgate. This street pattern was essentially medieval; many of the buildings were medieval too - and some, like the two ancient parish churches of Holy Trinity and St. Michael, were spectacularly beautiful legacies of the wealth enjoyed by the city in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The built-up area of the town was still almost entirely contained within the medieval walls. Many houses retained the long crofts that dated from the middle ages. Yet changes were fast occurring. The city's staple trade - the weaving of silk ribbons - had been growing rapidly since about 1770. The population was growing too: there were 16,000 inhabitants in 1801, nearly 18,000 ten years later, over 21,000 in 1821, 27,000 at the time of the Great Reform Bill. The press of people and traffic grew ever greater. Old roads were improved and new ones constructed by the street commissioners, during and after the French wars. Many ancient timbered houses were swept away in the process. To accommodate the growth in numbers, close-packed courts and back-to-back cottages were built on gardens undisturbed since the time of the Black Prince, behind the imposing houses fronting the main streets, and some large houses were cut up into tenements. Thus was aggravated the chronic filth and disease that surrounded rich and poor in the old city. Bricks and mortar spread outside it too - in the 1820s to the remote arcadian retreat of Primrose Hill, and in the decades that followed up the Foleshill and Stoney Stanton roads to the north: so that by mid-century, when the city itself contained 36,000 people, those who looked to it as their town overflowed its nominal boundaries and there was hardly a break in the lines of streets between Coventry

COVENTRY

Arms of the City

Arms of the See



Engraved by Storer & Greig from an Original Drawing Coventry with the Churches of Trinity & St Michael's &c

Bowling Green

Barrs Hill

Nicholas Church

Navigation Wharf & Basons

Leicester 10 to Hinckley 33 M.

Windmill

Swanswell Pool

Nauls Mill

Nauls Mill Lane

Radford Brook

Roman Catholic Chapel

Swanswell Gate

Town Wall

SHERBOURNE RIV.

Priory

Calico Manufactory

Remains of the Priory Cells

Trinity Church

St Michael's Church

St Michael's New Burial Gr.

Cross Cheaping

Ironmonger Row

Hill Street

Smithford Street

High Street

Earl Street

Jordan Well

Gosford Street

Lutterworth 15 M.

Third Manuf.

Barracks

Baptist Meeting

Chief Manor

Town Wall

River Sherbourne

Poddy Croft

Crow Moat

Summerhill

Butts Lane

Grey Friar's Green

The Park

SCALE

100 100 Yards

REFERENCE

1 Free School formerly St. John's Hospital
2 Remains of Cathedral
3 County Hall & Gaol
4 St. Mary's Hall
5 Drapers Hall
6 St. George's Chapel
7 House of Industry, formerly White Friars
8 Methodists Meeting
9 Postern Gate, to the White Friars
10 Grey Friars Steeple

REFERENCE

11 Ford Hospital
12 Quakers Meeting
13 Vicar Lane Meeting
14 Mayors Parlour
15 Market House
16 Presbyterian's Meeting
17 West Orchard Meeting
18 St. Johns (or Bablake) Church
19 Bonds (or Bablake) Hospital
20 Mill Lane Gate

The dotted line thus..... marks the division of the Parishes

Drawn and Engraved under the direction of E. W. Brayley.

THOMAS SHARP'S MAP OF COVENTRY 1807

and its neighbouring villages - Foleshill, Radford, Stoke - which were, like the city, centres of ribbon-weaving. This extension to the north has continued ever since: and was joined in the 1850s and 1860s by growth to east and west, till then partly inhibited by common lands disencumbered of pasture rights at that time.(1)

In other senses these two decades were of crucial significance: in the first the town council seriously began the long work of civic improvement that was eventually to remove the grosser environmental evils of the early nineteenth century, and in the second the ribbon trade began its long decline, at first cataclysmic, then slow and lingering, and the industry began to be replaced by others, their growth assisted in part by the pool of labour displaced by the slump in ribbons, in part by the skills of the city's traditional subsidiary craft, watchmaking, and in part by the new techniques and orientations of the new trades themselves: so that sewing-machines were followed by bicycles, and both by motor cars.

By the end of the century an aged inhabitant, reflecting in the year of the Diamond Jubilee on the strange phenomenon of the city - the conjunction of the ancient and the novel, black-and-white houses and modern factories, splendid Victorian roadworks and sewers serving a growing imperial city while 'petrified kidneys' still paved Well Street and Butcher Row was a squalid Tudor slum - could look back on sixty years of both hectic change and sleepy survival. Forty years later J.B. Priestley was similarly impressed - though the city's population had more than trebled since the 53,000 of 1891.(2)

> It is genuinely old and picturesque: the cathedral of St. Michael's, St. Mary's Hall, Ford's and Bablake Hospitals, Butcher Row, and the old Palace Yard. You peep round a corner and see half-timbered and gabled houses that would do for the second act of the Meistersinger ... These picturesque remains of the old Coventry are besieged by an army of nuts, bolts, hammers, spanners, gauges, drills, and machine lathes, for in a thick ring round this ancient centre are the motor-car and cycle factories, the machine-tool makers, the magneto manufacturers, and the electrical companies.(3)

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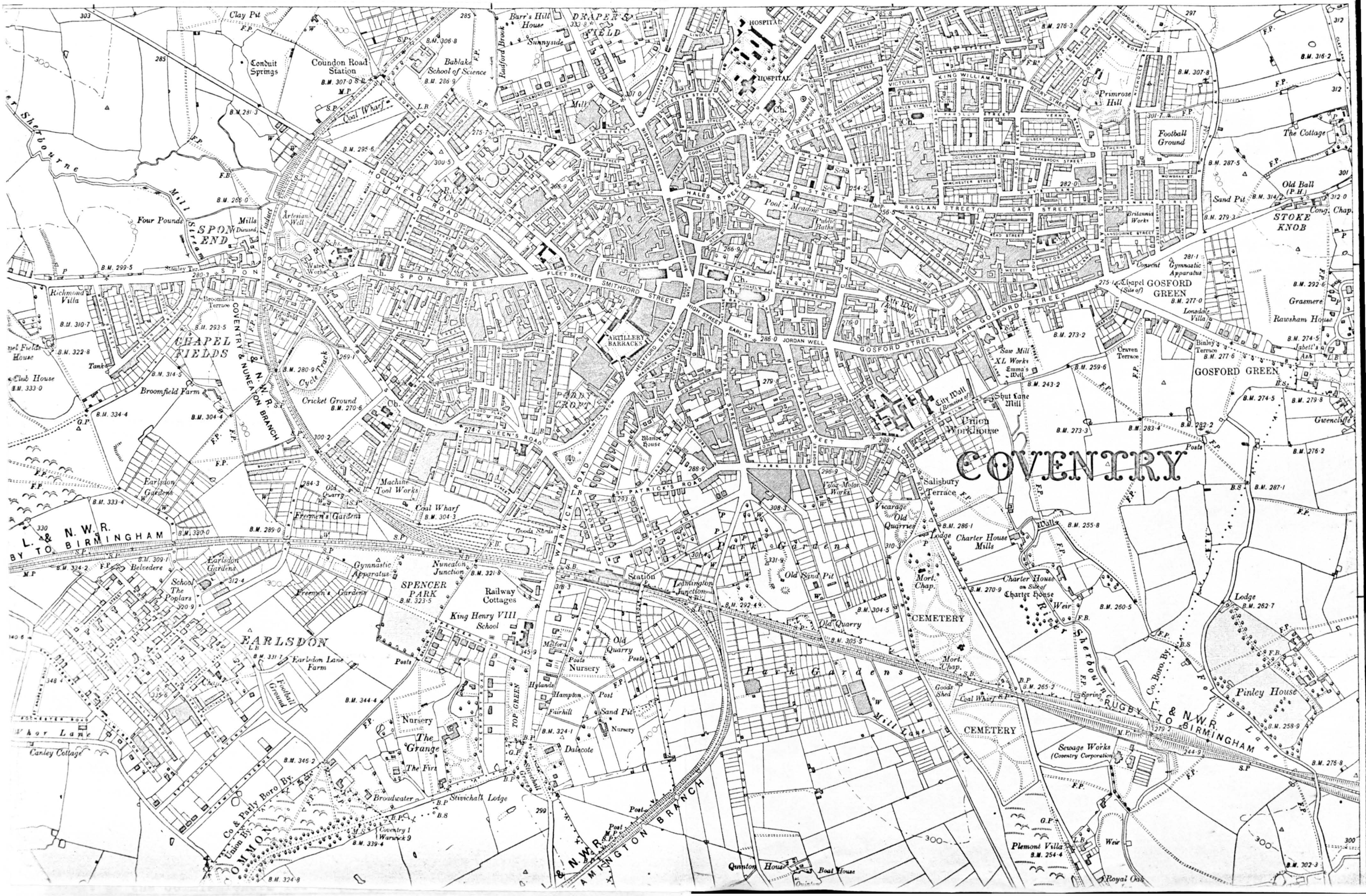
(1) In the south the Cheylesmore Park of the Marquises of Hertford and the Stivichall estate of the Gregory-Hood family prevented urban growth till this century.

(2) Boundary changes accounted in part for the increase.

(3) J.B. Priestley, English Journey (London, 1934), pp. 69 et seq. For the topographical material in this section, see in particular William Reader, New Coventry Guide (Coventry, c. 1825), pp. xxiii et seq; C.W.C.: Pamphlets Collection, Coventry 1837-1897: A Retrospect and Comparison (Coventry, 1897), pp. 7 et seq. W.B. Stephens, ed., Victoria History of the County of Warwick, viii (London, 1969), pp. 5 et seq. T. Sharp, Map of Coventry, 1807. Ordnance Survey 6" maps, Warwickshire, 1889 et seq. P.P.: [610] H.C. (1845) xviii, Second

CONT ...



Coventry 1906 : Ordnance Survey 6" Warwickshire XXI S.E.

It would be impossible to stage The Mastersingers in Coventry today: the physical landscape has changed as dramatically since the 1930s as it had in the previous century. As Priestley wrote, the civic rebuilding promoted by a zealous town council was removing many of the black-and-white houses and narrow medieval lanes. Most that remained at the outbreak of the Second World War were destroyed by the two air-raids of 1940 and 1941 - in the same years, ironically, as the last few silk-ribbon weavers ceased to treadle their looms in the villages to the north of the city. In the rebuilding that has occurred since the Second World War the medieval street plan has been largely obliterated, or dwarfed by a superimposed ring-road, and most of the few remaining ancient houses have been demolished, or placed in an architectural museum as emblems of a vanished culture; the same process of erasure and relegation is now gnawing at the Victorian weavers' suburb of Hillfields - with the difference that there are no plans to preserve ribbon topshops, in museums or out. Apart from St. Mary's Hall, the churches of Holy Trinity and St. John, and other fragments, the city is now totally dominated by structures in the modern idiom. With the exception of Basil Spence's cathedral of St. Michael - the only successful twentieth-century reinterpretation of the Gothic mood - they break utterly with the past: concrete celebrations of civic panache, modern urban planning, and the pride of giant enterprise. They seem appropriate to a massively industrialised, forward-looking, self-confident city - the home of two of Britain's most successful exporting companies, British Leyland and Courtaulds: above all a city of motor-cars, looking forward eagerly (if we may believe Lord Stokes) to the increased exporting opportunities soon to be laid open by the Common Market, and sure of its ability to meet the reciprocating challenge of the Continent.

In mood early Victorian Coventry was as different from the modern city as it was in physical features. What follows is an attempt to describe, and to explain, some attitudes in the early Victorian city.

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(3) cont.
Report of the Commissioners for Enquiry into the State of Large Towns, Appendix, Part II, pp. 258 et seq.

CHAPTER ONE

The City and its Institutions

I

Coventry was a borough of ancient origin. Medieval charters had granted it a corporation. In the early nineteenth century the borough had for long consisted of the parishes of Holy Trinity and St. Michael (of which the parish of St. John was a subordinate part) - with the exclusion of their outlying districts of Willenhall, Coundon and Keresley. This area was often referred to as the 'city and suburbs'; it included much countryside. Only within it could the freedom of the borough be acquired. Only freemen or inhabitants of the borough could become members of the corporation. But Coventry was also a county, by virtue of a charter of 1451. The county was much more extensive. It included, besides the city and suburbs, the parishes of Ansty, Exhall, Foleshill, Stivichall, Stoke and Wyken, parts of Sowe and Shilton, and the hamlet of Keresley.(1) The corporation had powers over this wide area. It appointed the chief constable, sheriffs and coroner, and the town clerk was clerk of the peace. The borough aldermen and the mayor were ex officio the justices of the peace for the city and suburbs: they were also the magistrates for the county of the city, and in that capacity conducted the sessions and fixed the county rate. The Warwickshire magistrates had no jurisdiction within the county of the city. The parliamentary borough was coterminous with the 'city and suburbs'; only freemen were electors, though they might reside anywhere, even abroad. On the other hand, freeholders of the county of the city had no franchise

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(1) Thus Coundon and Willenhall, though parts of Holy Trinity parish, were not in the county of the city.

for Warwickshire - their county technically being excluded from it.(1)

This last anomaly was ended by the Great Reform Act.(2) Shortly after, the old corporation was swept away by the Municipal Corporations Act, and replaced by an elected town council. Owing to an ambiguity in that act the barristers in charge of fixing the boundaries of municipal wards decided that the borough was co-extensive with the county of the city, and as a result the entire area was divided into six wards for municipal purposes and the householders of the out-parishes helped to elect the new town council. But many of them believed that a more recent act (3) in fact severed the county from the city altogether. This they welcomed, since, they said, the county rate in Warwickshire was lower than that for the county of the city. The city denied the charge: statistics on the question were hurled by interested parties at each other for years. The dissident ratepayers of the out-parishes refused to pay the Coventry county rate. A complex legal battled took place. The Court of Exchequer decided against the city in 1842.(4) The Coventry Boundary Act of 1842 dissolved the county of the city - returning it to Warwickshire - and defined new boundaries for the municipal borough of Coventry.(5) This was henceforth far less extensive than the 'city and suburbs', consisting, until boundary extensions after 1890, of little more than the area built up by 1840. Throughout the changes of the 1830s and 1840s, however, the parliamentary borough of Coventry remained coterminous with the old 'city and suburbs', till it was extended slightly after the 1867 reform bill.(6)

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(1) P.P: H.C. 141 (1831-32) xl: Reports from Commissioners on .. Boundaries of Boroughs, Parts v and vi, p. 83 and map. The Report of the Municipal Commissioners on ... Coventry, (Coventry, 1835), pp. 4 et seq. Mary Dormer Harris, ed., The Coventry Leet Book ... 1420-1555 (London, Early English Text Society, 1907-13), map of the county of the city. As a county, Coventry possessed its own assizes.

(2) 2 and 3 William IV, cap. 45, clause 17, and Schedule G.

(3) 6 and 7 William IV, cap. 103: Boundaries Act Amendment Act.

(4) See the Coventry Standard and Coventry Herald, 1836-1842, in particular 23 December 1836 and 15 July 1842, and Benjamin Poole, Coventry: its History and Antiquities (Coventry, 1870), pp. 97 et seq.

(5) 5 and 6 Vict., cap. 110.

(6) P.P: [3972] H.C. (1867-68) xx : Report of the Boundary Commission for England and Wales, pp. 88 et seq (and detailed map).

II

Long before 1800 the corporation had become close and self-perpetuating. It consisted of a mayor, not more than ten aldermen - one for each of the ten wards of the city - and a number of councillors which by charter could not exceed thirty-one and which often fell below that number. Vacancies among the councillors and aldermen were filled by the corporation itself.(1) Both councillors and aldermen were appointed for life. The formal qualification for election was being a freeman or 'free citizen'(2) of the borough. The mayor and corporation officers were elected at the autumnal ceremony of the grand inquest or leet, by the mayor and councillors (with the addition whenever necessary of previous holders of some corporate offices, to bring the total of the inquest to thirty-one). The corporation officers consisted of the town clerk, chief constable, recorder, steward, sheriffs, chamberlains, coroner, wardens, sword-bearer, mace-bearer, sub-bailiffs, town crier, and the ordinary constables. Many of these offices did not of course entail full-time duties, and those of recorder and wardens were purely honorary. The recordership was given to a friendly nobleman as a sign of respect; the wardenship was a step towards higher office.

The corporation and its officers were a close-knit group, united by family and friendship. Aldermen and mayors were invariably chosen from among the ranks of the councillors; and these were chosen from men who had acted as sheriff. Mayors often served for two years; one served from 1802 to 1806, another from 1806 to 1811, his successor from then to 1815, and another from then to 1818. The town clerk,

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(1) Vacancies in the ranks both of the aldermen and the councillors were often not filled. In 1818 there were only five aldermen and eleven councillors, and of course the mayor. In 1828 there were, besides the mayor, seven aldermen and nine councillors. I have drawn these figures from C.R.O.: Council Minutes 14, (1818-1821) and 16, (1826-1830).

(2) A free citizen was a native of the city, or a member of one of the incorporated trading companies, or a person who had purchased the freedom to become a victualler. The number of those who had purchased the freedom was tiny. They did not enjoy the parliamentary franchise, nor access to the freemen's charities, enjoyed by those who had acquired the regular freedom by servitude.

John Carter, a solicitor of the city, served from 1812 to 1836; he was also coroner, magistrates' clerk, clerk to the street commissioners, and clerk to the collector of assessed taxes. He or his partner prosecuted at the sessions.(1) Between 1779 and 1835 the Carter family supplied four members of the corporation - apparently the largest contribution made by any family, though the Vales provided three between 1754 and 1835. In all, twenty-one families each provided more than one member of the corporation between 1750 and 1835 - when there were only 132 corporators altogether. Many 'corporation' families were linked by marriage.(2)

As far as the city itself was concerned, the corporation's functions were limited almost entirely to admitting qualified apprentices to the freedom by servitude, and superintending the many charities of which it was trustee and the corporation's own monies, derived chiefly from the rents of its property.(3) Between February

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(1) This account of the old corporation is based upon The Report of the Municipal Commissioners on ... Coventry (Coventry 1835), pp. 9 et seq. Also, John Carter's brother Samuel was gaoler in Coventry: P.P: H.C. 148 (1826-27) iv, p. 7. Much of the blame for the maladministration of the corporation in these years must be given to John Carter. His correspondence in CRO (uncatalogued, Doggett Collection 'Miscellaneous documents found on the Muniment Room shelves, Box 2') show him to have been an extraordinarily bad man of business, in both public and private matters. For example, William Reader wrote five appeals in 1834-1835 without result, for his salary as steward for 1834: William Reader to John Carter, 6 April 1835. In 1843 Joseph Parker wrote eleven times, vainly, demanding money which Carter owed a client: 'If I do not hear from you this week you will understand that Mr. Finch will set some local brother on you, and rightly ... you will find yourself in rougher hands'. Joseph Parker to John Carter, 15 August 1843. Samuel Butler, headmaster of Shrewsbury School, wrote repeatedly for Carter's son's school fees for 1832: they were not paid till October 1834, after the threat of legal action.

(2) S.E. Kerrison, Coventry and the Municipal Corporations Act, 1835. (Birmingham M.A. thesis, 1939). Mr. Kerrison drew his figures from an analysis of the council minute books and the MS Notebook of William Downing, in C.R.O.

(3) The corporation's income in the early 1830s was about £2400 a year. Over £1600 came from its property rents, £500 from tithes, £31 from the rents of the corporation pews in the parish churches (let to non-members of the corporation), £160 from market tolls and £110 from the admission fees paid by victuallers for the nominal freedom. The Report of the Municipal Commissioners on ... Coventry, p. 29. The corporation's income in the 1820s was less, owing to mismanagement.

and December 1818 there were twenty-three meetings of the corporation. Claims from apprentices who had completed their time were confirmed or rejected at seventeen, leases, repairs and rentals for corporate properties decided upon at fifteen, and the recipients of loan and alms charities decided at three. The only other matters of formal business were the elections of the mayor and officers in October, and a resolution to pay £16 for plumbing work at the waterworks a few weeks later. Most meetings lasted a few hours only.(1) Even these duties weighed lightly on many. Only three corporators attended all meetings. Nine (out of seventeen) attended sixteen or fewer; one came once only.(2) More importantly, even the hard core who came often to settle leases and charitable disbursements made only perfunctory and ineffectual attempts to ensure that in a wider sense the finances in their care were properly tended. The council appointed a permanent auditor from among their number in 1760; he went bankrupt in 1767. Another was appointed in 1784 and seems to have done nothing. Meanwhile, committees were chosen to conduct audits in 1762, 1766 and 1780, and again in 1787, 1792, and 1803: again, nothing seems to have happened.(3) The corporation resolved in 1797 that 'if any work shall be done by any person or persons (the amount of which shall exceed the sum of £2) without the express order in writing of this House, such bill attending the same shall not on any pretence whatsoever be paid by this Corporation'.(4) These brave words came to nothing and in 1812 a precisely similar resolution was carried.(5) A desperate resolve at financial reformation was made in 1822. For the first time, bankers, instead of councillors, became treasurers to the corporation; all monies were to be paid into the bank; a finance committee of five was to superintend all cash payments made by the corporation; payments of more than £5 were to be made by cheques signed by the mayor and at

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(1) I have drawn these figures from an analysis of the C.R.O.: Council Minutes, 14, 3 February 1818 to 21 December 1818.

(2) loc. cit. See also S.E. Kerrison, op. cit., pp. 22 et seq; Mr. Kerrison argues that attendance had been poor since at latest the middle of the eighteenth century.

(3) S.E. Kerrison, op cit., pp. 119 et seq.

(4) ibid., p. 117, quoting council minute of 26 July 1797.

(5) loc. cit.

least two other members of the committee; the committee was to audit the finances every four months, and the council every year.(1) Thereafter the corporation monies were indeed paid into Beck and Prime's bank and all payments were made by cheques drawn on the account. But the only record of the payments was the cheque stubs; there was still no proper accounting system.(2) The records that did exist for the corporation's accounts were audited up to June 1822, but not, despite the scheme of that year and a further resolution to audit in 1825, thereafter.(3) Thus there were no surviving accounts for the corporation or the charities in its care from 1770 to 1800, and though they existed for the period after 1800 they were confused. In the seventeenth century and after charity monies had become mingled with the corporation's (thirty-seven charities thus disappearing) or with those of the persons appointed to look after them.(4) And the corporation was in debt. Its ordinary permanent expenditure was £1770. Its income should have covered this comfortably and produced a surplus too. But rentals were in arrears (5) and the fair and market tolls found their way into the pockets of the mayor (who claimed some as a perquisite) or the collectors, who also charged arbitrary amounts. More serious still was extraordinary expenditure - of which the most startling items were the entertainment of the corporation, and litigation. The deficit that resulted led at length to some corporation properties being mortgaged to pay the £2000 owed to its bankers, Beck and Prime.(6) The financial disorder continued until a group of reforming corporators, led by George Eld, took matters in hand after 1828.

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(1) C.R.O: Council Minutes 15, 20 February, 26 February 1822.

(2) The Report of the Municipal Commissioners on ... Coventry, p. 36.

(3) C.R.O: Council Minutes 15, 1 March 1825; 17, 18 December 1832.

(4) P.P.: H.C. 606 (1834) xxii : 28th Report of the Charity Commissioners, pp. 115 et seq.

(5) C.R.O.: Council Minutes 17, 7 February 1832.

(6) The Report of the Municipal Commissioners on ... Coventry, pp. 32 et seq. Over £2000 was spent on corporate entertainment in the three years ending October 1833 - a period when some reform had already occurred. Over £3000 was spent contesting the petition of the unsuccessful candidates at the 1826 general election, and the bill that followed to reduce the power of the corporation. An additional cause of loss was the payment to the mayors of the city for uncovenanted expenditure. £1615 was advanced to them between 1822 and 1828. ibid., p. 37.

There was another municipal body - the street commissioners, set up by act of parliament in 1763; another act in 1790 added to their previous powers of cleansing, lighting, and improving the streets of the 'city and suburbs' that of providing a watch.(1) The second act named thirty-five commissioners, and in addition the mayor was to be a member ex officio; vacancies were to be filled by co-optation. The number of active commissioners was far smaller. There were, for example, twenty meetings between August and December 1827. The maximum attendance was eight, at four meetings. At six meetings, a bare quorum turned up - five members. About eight men were the hard core of attenders. Six of these were corporators: S. Carter, W. Carter, Thomas Morris, Samuel Vale, S. Whitwell, James Weare; the other two were Charles Lilly, political opponent of the old corporation, and John Gulson.(2) In some respects the active commissioners were efficient. Narrow medieval streets were drastically widened, and gradients reduced, to speed the Georgian traffic flow; the Burges, and Earl, Fleet, Spon, Bishop and Gosford Streets were thus improved from the 1780s onwards. The most spectacular achievements were the construction of Hertford Street to enable through traffic to bypass the bottleneck of Greyfriars Lane, and the widening of Broadgate.(3) But the streets were badly lit and cleaned, piled high with heaps of dirt on which a few feeble oil lamps cast a sombre glow.(4) Like the corporation, the commissioners made ineffectual resolves to improve their accounting system. A full statement of account was demanded by two commissioners in 1797: a fortnight's postponement was granted for the request to be met, but the page in the minute book where it should have been entered was left blank. Seven years later a committee was appointed to investigate the accounts: no result is apparent. Two years later the treasurer went bankrupt.

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(1) The two acts are 3 Geo III, cap.41 and 30 Geo III, cap.77. The chief constable, as a county officer, was paid out of the county rate. The part-time ordinary constables of the county (appointed in the city and suburbs by the annual leet and elsewhere in the county by the parishes) were responsible to him. The street commissioners also appointed him superintendent of the night watch for the city and paid him an extra stipend from the rate. The Report of the Municipal Commissioners on ... Coventry, pp.16 et seq. C.R.O: Street Commissioners' Minutes, 30 August 1827, 4 August 1831, 22 November 1832.

(2) C.R.O: Street Commissioners' Minutes, 30 August to 27 December 1827. The corporators mentioned also attended council meetings regularly. See also the mordant letter of complaint about the apathy and absence of the great majority of commissioners, by George Eld, the dynamic Tory corporator, Coventry Herald, 21 November 1834.

(3) William Reader, New Coventry Guide (Coventry, c.1825),pp.xxii et seq.

(4) Coventry Observer, 24 November 1827, 17 October, 21 November 1834, Coventry Herald, 16 January, 25 December 1835 (letter from 'Inhabitant in Darkness').

Bankers were then appointed to act as treasurers - sixteen years, it should be said in the commissioners' favour, before the corporation took a similar step.(1) Thereafter the accounts seem to have been properly kept.(2) But they were published only once, and despite the rate-yield (£53,000 between 1790 and 1834) there were financial crises: for example, the watchmen were not paid for seven weeks in 1835. George Eld, an active new commissioner, promised redress of this and of the lighting and cleaning of the streets. He could do little before the street commissioners transferred their functions to the new town council in February 1836.(3) For many years they did no better.

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(1) C.R.O: Street Commissioners' Minutes, 7 September 1797, 8 November 1804, 4 September 1806.

(2) The only account book surviving is for the period 1823-1835 (C.R.O.) It is detailed and thorough.

(3) Coventry Herald, 19 September, 21 November 1834 (letter of George Eld) 20 February 1835. See also V.C.H. Warwickshire, viii, p.272.

III

The freemen of the city were regarded as part of the corporation, though collectively they had no control over it nor share in its functions. For many years, the freedom of the city had been acquired by servitude - by apprentices who had served seven years to one and the same trade in the city and its suburbs - and the parliamentary franchise had been confined to freemen so qualified. This principle was several times reaffirmed by Committees of the Commons in the eighteenth century, in reply to the corporation's attempts to influence parliamentary elections by refusing to admit duly qualified apprentices to the freedom and by admitting unqualified men. An act of 1772 bound the corporation to admit all men duly qualified.(1) Eight years later the admission of unqualified men by the corporation reached its zenith, at a closely contested election at which the corporation candidates were returned by the votes of the 'mushroom' freemen. The defeated candidates petitioned against the result; the committee of enquiry found that the mushroom men had been wrongfully admitted, and that their votes were therefore invalid; thus the petitioners were returned. There followed an act of parliament to prevent any further illegal admissions.(2) The act laid down a complicated procedure to be followed by the corporation and the town clerk to ensure that only men who had served seven years' apprenticeship to one and the same trade in the city and its suburbs were admitted to the freedom and registered as freemen. Apprentices out of their time had to submit full particulars of their claims to the freedom to the town clerk, verify them on oath, and were to be admitted at open meetings of the council several weeks later, after time for scrutiny of their claims. The town clerk had to enter all details into the freemen's admission book and he and the corporators present had to sign the entries. Severe penalties were laid down for refusing to

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(1) 12 Geo III, cap. 21.

(2) C.R.O: Levi Fox, 'A Study of the Freedom of Coventry with special reference to the admission of women' (MS, 1939) passim. T.W. Whitley, The Parliamentary History of the City of Coventry (Coventry, 1894), pp. 118 et seq. V.C.H. Warwickshire, viii, pp. 252 et seq. The Report of the Municipal Commissioners on ... Coventry, p. 17. The 1781 act was Geo III, cap. 54: An Act for the better regulating Election of Citizens to sit in Parliament for the City of Coventry.

admit persons duly qualified or for failure to make proper entries in the admission book. At parliamentary elections any intending voter could be required by a candidate or two freemen to swear on oath that he had been admitted to the freedom in due form, and any who refused to do so were to be excluded from the poll by the returning officers - whose default in this duty was to be penalised. The town clerk had also to keep a register of apprentices' indentures as a check upon fraudulent claims to the freedom.

This act remained in force until this century,(1) and the freemen's admission books which were kept continuously from 1781 onwards have enabled an analysis to be made of those admitted to the freedom between that date and 1860.(2) This is given on pages 12 to 17.

The table is in some respects necessarily refractory evidence. It cannot show the composition of the body of freemen at any one point in time: in one sense obviously, since it can take no account of the deaths from their ranks; and more subtly, since it does not with certainty indicate at many points the precise social standing of men at the time of their admission, nor of course their changing fortunes afterwards.(3) Thus, for example, all men who served in the dyeing trade are listed as 'dyers'; there is no equivalent to the ribbon manufacturers and silkmen who are differentiated from the weavers. Some from humble origin prospered, though their rise is revealed only occasionally, as in the case of David Buckney, radical and freemen's leader in the 1830s, 1840s and 1850s: he began as a simple weaver, and became a ribbon manufacturer with warehouse premises in Much Park Street by the 1840s.(4) Nevertheless, when all qualifications are

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(1) Acts of 1920 and 1927 reduced the necessary period of apprenticeship to five years, extended the area where it might be served to that of the county borough (much larger than the old 'city and suburbs') and added the attainment of the age of twenty-one as a qualification necessary for the freedom. V.C.H. Warwickshire, viii, pp. 274 et seq. By the Representation of the People Act of 1918, with its enfranchisement of all adult males on a common register, the freedom ceased to convey the suffrage, but freemen of the city continued, as they do today, to enjoy important charitable privileges. Thus freemen are still enrolled in some numbers in the city, under provisions very similar to those of the 1781 act.

(2) From the period before 1781, there exist in C.R.O. only fragmentary rolls of the freemen, and an incomplete alphabetical index of freemen from 1722 onwards. Loss from the record office until its recent efficiency may account somewhat for the fragmentary nature of these records.

(3) Nor may the Coventry pollbooks be used to cast light on these obscurities: they do not list the freemen's occupations. Nor does the only surviving official register of electors - C.R.O: Coventry List of Voters, 1835.

(4) F. White, History, Gazetteer and Directory of Warwickshire (Sheffield, 1850), p. 557. Possession of a warehouse marked off Buckney and those like him from the master weavers who occasionally manufactured on their own account from their domestic loom-shops, on the 'teapot system'. See pp. 196 et seq below.

made it is still clear that throughout this period of eighty years the Coventry freemen were predominantly artisans, small employers and shop-keepers, with only a minority of professional men and employers of large numbers of men. Most weavers and watchmakers necessarily remained small men, though in these largely domestic trades a sizeable number of masters had three or four journeymen employees. The table does reflect graphically the dominance of the city's life by these two trades throughout the period, but it cannot be used with assurance to reveal their fortunes over short periods of time. Admissions to the freedom were the result, in part, of decisions over apprenticeship taken at least seven years before; in addition there was no bar in the 1781 act to the period in which a qualified apprentice might assume the freedom. Many seem to have delayed their admission until the occasion of an election: this practice certainly seems to have been the reason for the flood of admissions in the weeks before the hotly contested election of 1826 - a flood therefore largely responsible for the large numbers of freemen admitted in the decade 1821-1830. But, even so, the decline in weavers and the rise in watchmakers admitted in the last two decades of the period (and especially the last decade) can only be seen as the result of a general feeling in the city that as the outdoor ribbon trade was increasingly menaced by the steam factory the watch trade had the rosier future.

Possession of the freedom brought the parliamentary franchise for the borough, and the right of pasturing two horses and a cow, or two cows and a horse, over 300 acres of common land throughout the year, and over about 1000 acres of Lammas and Michaelmas land(1) from Old Lammas or Old Michaelmas to Old Candlemas.(2) Thus though these lands were farmed in severalty their proprietors did not have an unfettered use of them and could not build permanent structures upon them.(3) Any buildings on them, or fences calculated to prevent free

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(1) The extent of these lands was often given as 2000 acres: e.g. The Report of the Municipal Commissioners on ... Coventry, p. 32. But when surveyed prior to enclosure in the 1850s their area was found to be 1,035 acres. They were chiefly in the SW - NW quadrant near to the city, but there were also scattered pieces in other directions. The commons were disposed in small pieces in the southern semi-circle between the SW and NE edges of the city. See V.C.H. Warwickshire, viii, p. 200 (map).

(2) That is, between the dates of these festivals according to the Julian calendar.

(3) The Report of the Municipal Commissioners on ... Coventry, pp. 18, 32.

Table I: Analysis by trades of the apprenticeships served by men admitted as Coventry freemen, 1781-1860

	1781-1790	1791-1800	1801-1810	1811-1820	1821-1830	1831-1840	1841-1850	1851-1860	TOTAL
PROFESSIONAL, HIGHER COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL									
Auctioneer								1	1
Attorneys		1							1
Architect, surveyor								1	1
Bankers		1					1	1	3
Brewer								1	1
Cotton and woollen manufacturers and merchants	10	1	4						15
Gas fittings manufacturer								1	1
Medical men: (a) apothecaries, chemists, druggists	2		4	2	5	1	1	3	18
(b) surgeons		2	1	1	5	1			10
Sail manufacturer								1	1
Schoolmasters	1	1	1	2	2		1	7	15
Scriveners	2	7	1	8	6	5	2	8	39
Soda water manufacturer								1	1
Silkmen and silk manufacturers	25	32	41	61	64	58	33	64	378
Watch manufacturers			1	2	11	7	1	8	30
Wine and liquor merchants					2		1		3
Merchants and manufacturers		1	1						2
Carried forward	40	46	54	76	95	72	40	97	520

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	1781-1790	1791-1800	1801-1810	1811-1820	1821-1830	1831-1840	1841-1850	1851-1860	TOTAL
Brought forward	40	46	54	76	95	72	40	97	520
SHOPKEEPERS, LOWER COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL									
Agricultural workers: (a) farmers,graziers,dealers,chapmen			1	2	2	2	8	1	16
(b) gardeners,nurserymen,seedsmen	6	5	6	5	3		1	4	30
Bakers and confectioners	8	12	10	9	9	9	10	12	79
Barbers and hairdressers	23	15	10	3	3	5	10	1	70
Basket makers	1	3		3	4	2			13
Bookkeepers, clerks						1		2	3
Bookbinders				1	1	1	1		4
Brickmakers	1	2			2	1	2		8
Brushmakers	2	1	3	8	4	8	8	6	40
Building workers: (a) bricklayers	1	4	5	5	9	6	1	6	37
(b) builders			1		4	1	3	5	14
(c) painters,plumbers and glaziers	5	6	9	9	16	11	18	17	91
(d) plasterers			3	1	4		3	2	13
(e) stonemasons		1	3	5	5		2	2	18
Butchers	41	15	16	10	24	20	15	19	160
Carriers and porters	2		1	2			1		6
Chandlers and tallow chandlers	1	4	1		2	1			9
Carried forward	131	114	123	139	187	140	123	174	1131

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Brought forward	131	114	123	139	187	140	123	174	1131
Coachmakers and coachpainters			1	1	1	2	4	3	12
Coaldealers			1	1	4			2	8
Chimney sweeps	1	1		1	3	2		5	13
Clothing trade workers: (a) breeches makers	3	2	1	3	1				10
(b) cappers	1								1
(c) glovers	3	1	1						5
(d) hatters	1	2	1	3	2		1		10
(e) staymakers	13	7	1	3	2	3		2	31
(f) tailors	25	28	13	23	36	27	41	41	234
(g) threadmakers	3	1							4
Cork cutters			1			1	3		5
Cutlers, gunsmiths	1	1	3						5
Enamellers				1	2	2	3	5	13
Engineers, machinists							1	9	10
Engravers	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	10
Footwear makers: (a) clogmakers	2	2	3						7
(b) cordwainers, shoemakers	43	51	40	51	42	27	43	55	352
Gas fitter							1	2	3
Carried forward	228	211	191	227	281	205	221	300	1864

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Brought forward	228	211	191	227	281	205	221	300	1864
Grocers	6	14	11	25	29	13	10	19	127
Herald and sign painters					1		1		2
Ironmongers	3	5	7	4	7	3	2	1	32
Jeweller, silversmith							1		1
Leather workers: (a) curriers	3	4	5	6	4	4	10	11	47
(b) fellmongers	4		3	1					8
(c) leather dressers	2	4	4	1					11
(d) tanners			2						2
Locksmiths				1					1
Maltsters			1		2	1		4	8
Marine stores dealer								1	1
Mercers, drapers, hosiers and haberdashers	5	10	13	6	8	7	9	17	75
Metalworkers: (a) blacksmiths and jobbing smiths	6	6	8	4	6	10	7	1	48
(b) braziers	2	3	1	3	4		4	2	19
(c) tinsmiths and whitesmiths	4	7	5	6	6	6	7	21	62
(d) brass and iron founders and moulders							1	5	6
Millers and mealmen		1			3				4
Millwrights and engine turners			1	2	2		2	6	13
Carried forward	263	265	252	286	353	249	275	388	2331

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Brought forward	263	265	252	286	353	249	275	388	2331
Nailer							1		1
Oilmen	3					1			4
Papermakers, parchment makers, paper dealers	2		2	1	1				6
Pawnbrokers					1	1	3	4	9
Picture-frame makers and gilders						1	1	2	4
Pinmakers	2								2
Pipemakers and manufacturers			1		1		1	2	5
Poulterer							1		1
Printers, booksellers, stationers	3	7	9	11	17	6	17	22	92
Ropemakers and twiners	3	6	6	2	3	2	3	1	26
Saddlers, whittawers and horse-collar makers	6	6	6	1	7	5	1		32
Salesmen	1								1
Shopkeepers	1	2							3
Upholsterer								1	1
Carried forward	284	286	276	301	383	265	303	420	2518

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Brought forward	284	286	276	301	383	265	303	420	2518
Textile workers: (a) cotton and woollen weavers	6	4	14	1					25
(b) dyers	10	10	18	14	43	49	44	80	268
(c) feltmakers		5	2	4	1				12
(d) flax dressers	1	1							2
(e) pressers and whiteners,ribbon dressers		4		1	1	1	2		9
(f) ribbon designers,draftsmen						1	9	27	37
(g) silk ribbon weavers	417	446	305	340	745	709	443	310	3715
(h) woolcombers and woolstaplers	16	9	3	3	1	1			33
Victuallers	1	2	2	2		1			8
Watchmakers	40	76	130	244	216	159	342	777	1984
Woodworkers: (a) box and block makers			4						4
(b) chairmakers and turners	9	9	5	8	5	6	5	5	52
(c) carpenters,joiners and loom-makers	26	29	23	24	28	28	35	85	278
(d) coopers	4	6	1	3	3	4			21
(e) pattern-makers				1		2		3	6
(f) sawyers				2	2				4
(g) wheelwrights	3	4	4		1	1	1	2	16
Totals	817	891	787	948	1429	1227	1184	1709	8992

Source of Table: C.R.O: Freemen's Admission Books, 1781-1860 (7 volumes)

access by freemen during the pasture season, were ritually demolished each summer at the ceremony of the Lammas riding, when the chamberlains rode the boundaries of the lands, sometimes with a band and always with a group of vigilant freemen. The chamberlains customarily gave a dinner to important freemen afterwards.(1) The freedom also gave exclusive access to much the largest of the many charities in the city - Sir Thomas White's loan charity. This had originated with a bequest of Thomas White, a London merchant, in the reign of Henry VIII. Since that time the estates and income of the charity had grown greatly in value, and there had been much acrimonious litigation between the five boroughs - Leicester, Nottingham, Northampton and Warwick, in addition to Coventry - which shared its proceeds. By the early nineteenth century the five towns each took 40/70ths of the income in rotation every five years, for loans; and the greater part of the remainder was annually given to Coventry for distribution in £4 alms. The Coventry loans were of £50, interest-free for nine years. In 1833 £7,510 was on loan, and there was in addition £10,000 in the accumulated fund of the charity. The £4 gifts were by the terms of Sir Thomas White's bequest not limited to freemen, but open to all householders not in receipt of poor relief, but in practice they were distributed to freemen only. The trustees for the charity in Coventry (as for many others in the city) were the corporation. Its administration of all of them before the end of the 1820s was vastly incompetent, and it used its distribution of the £4 gift as a means of rewarding electors who voted for corporation candidates at parliamentary elections.(2)

The freemen were at least as vital and active a force in the nineteenth century as in the eighteenth. But of another link with Coventry's ancient past, the trading companies, it was said in 1835 that

> they have not, in modern times, in any way interfered with the trade of the town, or attempted to compel persons to take up their freedom, in order to carry on trade. Some of these bodies possess property, which is expended partly in charity and partly in festivity.(3)

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(1) The Lammas riding continued throughout the period, and was annually reported. For the ceremony see, e.g. Coventry Herald, 19 August 1831.

(2) P.P: H.C. 606 (1834) xxii : 28th Report of the Charity Commissioners, pp. 113 et seq. The amount of alms was rising because of the appreciation in the value of Sir Thomas White's estate. 171 freemen received the gift in 1818; in 1833 the number had risen to 185. C.R.O: Council Minutes 14, 19 May 1818, 18, 4 June 1833.

(3) The Report of theMunicipal Commissioners on ... Coventry (Coventry, 1835), p. 18.

The surviving records of the companies show indeed that they had lost all trace of their original function by the nineteenth century. Some ceased to exist altogether. The Cordwainers' Company admitted 65 members between 1658 and 1677, 32 between 1751 and 1770, and only 7 between 1805 and 1824. Admissions then ceased. 33 members of the Carpenters' Company attended the annual meeting in 1670, but only 8 in 1800; 3 came in 1840 but no further meetings were held. The Whittawers' Company had 107 members in 1683, 37 in 1750, and 17 in 1774; thereafter the register of members was no longer kept and the accounts which had contained it became themselves more and more perfunctory until they ceased in 1815. The Bakers' Company admitted 29 members between 1701 and 1720, and 10 between 1789 and 1808; the book was then closed - five years after the accounts had ceased. The Smiths' Company had 47 subscribing members in 1720, 12 in 1800, and 6 in 1820; records then ceased.(1) Other companies survived with completely changed functions. The Mercers' Company had 26 members in 1670, 11 in 1750, and 5 in 1800. From 1813 Stephen Freeman was theonly member; in 1829 he nominated 5 new members, none of whom were mercers. The Broad Weavers' and Clothiers' Company had 17 members in 1750, 12 in 1771, 5 in 1806 and 3 in 1830; the company staggered on till 1849, when 10 new members were admitted; they included 3 clergymen, William Wilmot the leading Tory solicitor, and R.K. Rotherham the watch manufacturer; there were no clothiers or weavers. By far the most prominent and wealthy of the companies by the early nineteenth century was the Drapers', whose property brought in £200 a year. Like the Mercers and Weavers, it spent its funds on charity and wining and dining its members.(2) The Fullers' Company experienced the most bizarre change. The last members to be

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(1) C.R.O: Cordwainers' Company, Apprentices' and Members' Admissions Book, 1657-1824. Book of Accounts of the Company of Carpenters in the City of Coventry, 1665-1840. Accounts of the Whittawers' Company, 1683-1815. Record of Admissions to the Bakers' Company of the City of Coventry, 1700-1808. British Museum: MSS Eg. 2906, Accompt Book of the Company of Smiths, Goldsmiths, Chandlers, Pewterers, Plumbers, Cutlers, and Wiredrawers in the City of Coventry, 1684-1821.

(2) C.R.O: Accounts of the Mercers' Company, 1579-1829. The Book of Orders for the Company of Broad Weavers and Clothiers, 1659-1771, and 1772-1915. W.G. Fretton, Trading Guilds of the City of Coventry (Hull, 1894), pp. 11 et seq. The Cappers' and Worstead Weavers' Companies also survived as purely social clubs into Fretton's day.

fullers were active in the 1770s. By 1837 there was only one member. He then nominated another. These two elected 7 more in 1860. In 1874 W.G. Fretton, headmaster of Catherine Bayley's Charity School, and keen antiquarian, was elected clerk. He turned it into an archaeological society, with learned papers and visits to sites.(1)

(1) W.G. Fretton, 'Memorials of the Fullers' Guild, Coventry', Transactions of the Birmingham Archaeological Society, 1877, pp. 28 et seq. The silkweavers of the city had formed their company in 1627, but their records do not seem to survive beyond 1703. I have found no reference to this company in any nineteenth-century source.

IV

Throughout the first three quarters of the nineteenth century ribbon weaving and watchmaking were much the largest trades in Coventry: as is indicated by Table I. Table II on page 22 reveals (besides the dominant position of Coventry in the ribbon trade) that the industry was of overwhelming significance in the city's economy until after the catastrophe of 1860 and 1861, that until then it was very much larger than the watch trade, and that although after then the latter overtook it briefly in numbers it was never so large as the ribbon industry had been at its zenith. Almost one quarter of the city's entire population was directly engaged in the ribbon trade in 1821 and 1841. By mid-century the proportion had risen to well over a quarter. The census for 1861 fails to show the advance of the 1850s, since the census was taken after the disaster of 1860 and the flight from the trade and the city that immediately followed. The steady decline of the ribbon trade continued for the rest of the century. By 1891 it employed only one sixteenth of the population. At the beginning of this century it employed only about one twenty-eighth.

The making of clocks and watches began in Coventry about the middle of the seventeenth century. In the eighteenth the watch trade grew; thereafter the making of clocks was comparatively unimportant.(1) In the middle of the century the Vale and Rotherham families began their long association with the watch industry. Growth seems to have been great (with some vicissitudes) during the French wars, and is somewhat indistinctly reflected in the increased number of watchmakers known to have been leet constables and other corporate officers in the first three decades of the nineteenth century.(2) Coventry shared the making of watches with London,

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(1) White's Directory of 1850 lists (p. 560) 60 manufacturers, of whom 55 made watches, 4 watches and clocks, and 1 clocks only.

(2) V.C.H. Warwickshire, ii, pp. 242 et seq, viii, pp. 170 et seq. P.P: H.C. 504 (1817) vi: Report from the Committee on the Petitions of Watchmakers of Coventry, pp. 71 et seq. See also E.P. Thompson, 'Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism', Past and Present, 38 (1967), pp. 66 et seq.

Table II: Numbers employed in the ribbon and watch trades, 1801-1901 (1)

		1801	1811	1821	1831	1841	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901
Population of Coventry (2)		16049	17923	21242	27070	28781	36208	40936	39474	44313	53016	61770
Watchmakers in Coventry:	Males					822	1679	2037	(3)		3032	1937
	Females					9		68	(3)		534	687
Silk workers of all types in Coventry:	Males			4973(4)		3232	4170	3988	(5)		896	506
	Females					3106	6472	6955	(5)		2512	1671
Silk workers of all types in Warwickshire: (6)	Males			13346(4)		6132	8158	7641	3792	2402	1501	684
	Females					6498	14578	14851	9883	6912	4265	2608

(1) Sources of table. For simple population figures: V.C.H. Warwickshire, ii (London, 1908), pp. 182 et seq. For occupational figures: P.P: H.C. 134 (1818) ix : Minutes of Evidence of the Select Committee on the Silk Ribbon Weavers' Petitions, p.7 : [587] H.C. (1844) xxvii : Abstract of the ... Population of Great Britain, part 1, pp. 275 et seq; [1691-I] H.C. (1852-53) xxxviii, part I : Census of Great Britain, Population Tables, pp. 476 et seq, 505 et seq; [3221] H.C. (1863) liii, part II : Census of England and Wales, Population Tables, pp. 475 et seq, 510 et seq; [C.872] H.C. (1873) lxxi, part I : Census of England and Wales, Population Abstracts, pp. 321 et seq, 333 et seq; [C.3722] H.C. (1883) lxxx : Census of England and Wales, Vol iii, p. 251 ; [C. 7058] H.C. (1893-94) cvi : Census of England and Wales, vol. iii, pp. 252 et seq; [Cd. 1175] H.C. (1902) cxxi : Census of England and Wales: County of Warwick, pp. 455 et seq.

(2) 'Coventry' connotes in this table the 'city and suburbs', the central portions of the parishes of St. Michael and Holy Trinity that formed the municipality before 1842 and the parliamentary borough before 1867.

(3) There were 2196 males and 69 females over 20 in the watch trade.

(4) These figures refer to 1818 and are drawn from an unofficial census compiled by the ribbon weavers.

(5) There were 1904 males and 3706 females over 20 in the ribbon trade.

(6) The figures under this head included from 1841 onwards small numbers of silkworkers in Birmingham and other places outside the ribbon area, but the overwhelming majority of persons here included were ribbon workers in Coventry and north Warwickshire.

Liverpool, and the small Lancashire town of Prescot. Until the 1880s outwork dominated these centres. Work was minutely subdivided. In Coventry it was customary for a workman to be apprenticed to one branch only; there were 102 such branches in 1817; in 1851 Charles Bray, in his survey of the local trade, distinguished 24. The many parts of the watch(1) were made by specialist workmen and fitted together by the finishers - esteemed the most expert craftsmen - who set the final product in motion. Parts were made by hand, with the aid of simple tools, and were not always regularly interchangeable; they had to be adjusted for individual watches. Watch manufacturers received the parts made in domestic workshops and took them to the watch finishers. There was much to-ing and fro-ing. To economise time and energy some manufacturers, towards the end of the eighteenth century, aggregated all or many of the productive processes under one roof. In 1851, when Charles Bray surveyed these establishments in Coventry, 609 males (284 journeymen and 325 apprentices) were employed in them. Bray called them 'factories'; but 'workshops' would have been a better term, since no power was used and the mode of production was unaltered.(2) Most journeymen worked either in the domestic shops of master watchmakers (who also had apprentices) or in the even smaller workrooms in their own homes.(3) Since no expensive machinery

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(1) Increasingly in the nineteenth century the rough plates and trains of the movements were made in Prescot and sent to the other centres for completion.

(2) Thus these 'factories' were akin to the loomshops in the weaving trade. In 1852 Harriet Martineau visited Rotherham's watch workshop in Spon Street, 'the largest watch manufactory in the inland counties, if not in the kingdom', where 9000 watches were made each year: ranging from ones 2" thick and decorated with Speed the Plough or the Odd Fellows' Arms, for farm labourers and Scots, to ones with Arabic numerals and no pictures, for the Moslem market. All the parts were made in Rotherham's workshop, apart from the jewels, the glasses (from Dublin), some wheels (from Prescot), and the faces (made elsewhere in Coventry); the cases were engine-turned elsewhere in Coventry too. 'Time and the Hour', Household Words, 6 March 1852, pp. 555 et seq.

(3) Bray counted 30 or 40 small masters; they were the equivalents of 'first-hands' in the weaving trade. Bray's total of journeymen and apprentices for the entire trade, 1827 (1218 of them being outdoors), was larger by 148 than the 1851 census figure (see Table II). Bray included the females, whom he described as 'very few', but not the masters. These were, however, included in the census, thus making the disparity greater. Mr. Prest states, The Industrial Revolution in Coventry (Oxford, 1960), p. 81, that in 1851 there were over 2,000 watchmakers in Coventry; he gives no reference for the assertion, which does not seem to be justified by any source.

was required, the chief step that had to be taken by a journeyman who wished to become a master was the acquisition of a larger workshop. Many provident journeymen made this change in status.(1)

Table II demonstrates clearly that the Coventry watch industry grew between 1841 and 1861. During this period of growth watchmakers were more secure, and better paid, than ribbon weavers. Watchmaking was much less a victim of seasonal fluctuations. Longer periods of slump and boom were apparently rarer too, if we may judge by the silence of the press.(2) Above all, watchmakers were not plagued by the chronic surplus of labour which was for so long the underlying evil of the ribbon trade. Watchmaking required much skill that could not be picked up quickly, like the simpler deftness needed in the lower reaches of the ribbon trade. Nor were the small masters and the journeymen who bulked so large in the watch trade willing for women (a main source of the labour-surplus in the ribbon trade) to acquire it. 'The workmen are all opposed to it, because they know it means more work at less wages': hence the very small number of women in the trade - which was, said Bray, 'in the singular and anomalous position of masters competing for workmen, rather than the ordinary one of workmen competing for employment'.(3) Thus the average wages of journeymen in the watch trade were much higher than those of ribbon weavers; Bray stated them to be 25s a week at mid-century, and in the mid-1860s they were 30s. Exceptional workmen could earn more - though rarely more than £2 a week.(4) Payments were by piece-work (except, perhaps, sometimes in the 'factories'),

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(1) For this paragraph, see J. Tripplin, Watch and Clock Making in 1889: An Account of the Exhibits in the Horological Section of the French International Exhibition (London, 1890), p. 47. Coventry Herald, 21 November 1851. Charles Bray, The Industrial Employment of Women (London, 1857), p. 10, P.P: H.C. 504 (1817) vi, pp. 74 et seq. V.C.H. Warwickshire, viii, pp. 150, 171.

(2) Charles Bray stated that production increased threefold between 1800 and 1850: Coventry Herald, 21 November 1851. Harriet Martineau thought Rotherham's production increased by 50 per cent between 1842 and 1852. Household Words, loc.cit. The watch industry was depressed in 1817, booming in 1824, depressed in 1848 and again in 1860. P.P.: H.C. 504 (1817) vi, pp. 5 et seq. Coventry Herald, 24 September 1824. Coventry Standard, 16 June 1848, 19 October 1860.

(3) Charles Bray, The Industrial Employment of Women, pp. 10 et seq.

(4) Coventry Herald, 21 November 1851. Reports of Artizans selected by a Committee Appointed by the Society of Arts to visit the Paris Universal Exhibition (London, 1867), p. 351. The authors of the watch-making chapter were John Gregory and James Stringer, Coventry watch-makers. Bray's statement in 1851 that the very best workmen could earn £4 or £5 a week was convincingly refuted by an angry letter the following week. Coventry Herald, 28 November 1851.

but not in accordance with any 'list of prices' binding on all, as was common in the ribbon trade.(1) Nor was there a trade union, as in the weaving industry.

In their several attempts to establish a union and a list the watchmakers advanced as justification the value they would have in fighting the underlying troubles of the industry. Competition from Swiss and French watches was complained of in 1843.(2) Five years later it was blamed, in part, for the slump then existing in the watch trade. Coventry craftsmanship, argued Coventry watchmakers, was at its best excellent: but quality for quality Swiss watches were cheaper; Coventry could not match Switzerland in the production of good cheap watches; many cheap English watches were worthless 'duffers' that brought the entire trade into disrepute. A meeting of watchmakers suggested an association to gain higher prices than those current, make them standard by a list, and guard the latter by supporting members in times of slump to make their working under price unnecessary. A list would protect the principled, both manufacturers and men, against the unprincipled; high wages would encourage the improvements in method and craftsmanship that would enable Coventry to make better inexpensive watches. But only seventy watchmakers could be persuaded to join and the association was stillborn.(3) Ten years later a group of watchmakers, inspired they said by the current success of the ribbon weavers in extending and fortifying their list, founded a similar association. Once again the need to improve craftsmanship, especially in the production of cheap watches, was advanced as a reason to raise and list the prices for work. Over 600 watchmakers joined the association within seven months. But from the summer of 1859 onwards it ran increasingly into difficulties. The case makers, dial makers and engravers decided that their several interests would be best served by separate associations and withdrew from the union, thus depleting its resources but without in fact forming viable associations of their own. The committee drew up a list of prices for motioners, cap makers and finishers and pressed it on the manufacturers in the summer of 1859; but only six manufacturers turned up at the meeting planned to discuss it. The manufacturers turned the watchmakers' arguments on their head and declared that Swiss competition made a list

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(1) In its wide variation of earnings, and its lack of a list, the watch trade was very similar to the most skilled section of the ribbon trade - the figured or fancy branch.

(2) Coventry Standard, 28 July, 4 August 1843.

(3) ibid., 16 June 1848.

of prices impossible. The menace of foreign competition became greater early in 1860, because of the Cobden-Chevalier treaty.(1) In the event, imports of watches from France increased from 54,000 between March and August 1859, to 83,000 in the corresponding period of 1860. In October 1860 the attempt to gain higher prices and a list had perforce to be abandoned.(2) Seven years later there was neither list nor union.(3)

Table II suggests (if allowance is made for the apprentices to be added to the number of workers aged more then twenty) that the industry continued to grow in the 1860s: and certainly there were more workers in the trade in 1891 than thirty years earlier. But by then the watch trade was already in decline, and the last period of expansion was (like the corresponding period for the ribbon trade in the 1850s) a time of growing crisis. English craftsmanship remained supreme for years for the most expensive timepieces. English marine chronometers were so much better than French that in 1890 England was making 300 a year, while the French annual production had dropped from 100 to 40 since 1855. England also continued to make the best pocket watches for the highest class of trade. But in the mass market she was able decreasingly to compete with France and Switzerland. English watches were often unornamented; so much was industrial design neglected that manufacturers who wanted to make them attractive had to engage Swiss engravers. 'The aims of the English maker have chiefly been to supply a correct time keeper; in these endeavours he has often neglected art and taste and simply produced a scientific object. The Swiss maker, on the contrary (is) anxious to supply a marketable object - showy and tasty.'(4) Watches of a given quality were also made much more cheaply by the French and Swiss than by Coventry and the other English centres. A popular watch costing the Coventry manufacturer £3.2s. to make in the 1860s was produced by the French for £1.8s. The French and Swiss employed more female labour (though they paid their men more than the Coventry manufacturers), subdivided their manufacturing process more than Coventry, and yet took pains to instruct all their watchmakers, in horological schools, in the

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(1) Not only because the import of French watches would be easier, but also because Swiss watches would be sent to Britain via France.

(2) Coventry Standard, 3 September, 17 September 1858, 8 April, 14 October 1859, 27 January, 17 February, 28 September, 19 October 1860. Imports of Swiss watches were said to have increased from 42,000 in 1853 to 160,000 a year in the early 1860s. T.C. Barker and J.R. Harris, A Merseyside Town in the Industrial Revolution: St. Helens, 1750-1900 (Liverpool, 1954), p. 370.

(3) Reports of Artizans ... to Visit the Paris Universal Exhibition, p. 351.

(4) ibid., p. 353.

principles of their craft so that they might see its place in the larger pattern: there was no parallel to this wide training in the Coventry apprenticeship system, where boys were taught merely one task thoroughly. Continental manufacturers were often eager to introduce new techniques; the English were reluctant and resisted, for example, the substitution of the going-barrel for the old fusee long after the French and Swiss had adopted the former.

The final and most serious blow was the development in the United States in the 1860s of watchmaking by powered machinery in factories - a threat first bruited in Coventry in the 1840s, dismissed as an impossibility by spokesmen for the trade, but rightly still noised by Charles Bray, that prophet of doom for outwork trades.(1) The new American techniques enabled fully interchangeable parts to be cheaply made. It posed to continental and English manufacturers a major challenge: because of Coventry's failure to meet it sufficiently the industry began to decline at the end of the 1870s. The new technology entailed the end of the outwork system of hand-manufacture in small workshops. Few manufacturers were able, or willing, to invest the capital required: the effect may be seen in the dramatic decline in the number of watchmakers in the city in the 1890s, shown in Table II.(2) Rotherham's, the oldest firm in England, was the most adaptable. By 1889 it had converted its Spon Street workshop into the largest factory of the new type in Europe, was employing female labour on a large scale, and could produce 100 watches a day. This was one per cent of the output of the equally revolutionised Swiss industry. By 1936 Rotherham's was one of five watchmaking firms left in the city.(3) Today it alone remains: though in fact marine chronometers are the only timepieces it still makes and - which is symptomatic of so much that has occurred in Coventry in the twentieth century - the firm now for the most part produces complicated switchgear for the motor industry.

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(1) Coventry Standard, 28 October 1842, 31 March, 7 April, 27 October 1843. Charles Bray, op. cit., p. 10.

(2) French watchmaking, but not of course the Swiss, declined for the same reasons.

(3) For this section, see Reports of Artizans ... to visit the Paris Universal Exhibition, pp. 343 et seq. J. Tripplin, op. cit., pp. 3 et seq. The English Watchmaker, November 1887, January 1888 (a short-lived Coventry publication). T.P. Hewitt, English Watchmaking under Free Trade (Liverpool, 1903), passim. The Directory of Coventry Manufactures, 1936-37 (Coventry, 1936).

V

The story of political conflict in Coventry in the eighteenth century was complex and convoluted: but the dominant theme was the battle between the corporation and its opponents - the 'yellows' and the 'dark blues' or 'old blues'.(1) Parliamentary elections, when each side tended to have its own candidates, were a bitter focus of this conflict. They were frequent by eighteenth-century standards, fourteen occurring between 1715 and 1790, and they were fought with considerable violence, expense, and ingenious manipulation of the large freeman electorate. This numbered about 2,000 at the beginning of the century and 2,500 at the end; many of them were hon-resident - a feature of the constituency down to the first reform act - and both sides strove hard to bring the out-voters to the poll.(2)
The corporation was often referred to as 'Whig' and its opponents as 'Tories', but much of their conflict turned on purely local grievances - a prime cause of the blues' complaint against the yellows being the corporation's maladministration of the city's charities, including, ironically, its use of them for the purposes of electoral corruption. The quarrel was in part religious. Since 1695 the corporation had been controlled by dissenters, who used their powers of co-optation to stay in the saddle thereafter. The opposition was Anglican.
'The broad line of distinction in politics was as yet between the High party, who supported King and Constitution in Church and State, and the Low, who, with no hostility to King and Constitution, had the whole slang of civil and religious liberty tacked to their creed, with very little definite indication of what the phrase really meant.'(3)
This local battle was powerful enough to absorb and transmute the Wilkesite populist movement of the late 1760s and after. In Birmingham, the Black Country, and the parliamentary borough of Worcester, the Wilkesite movement emerged as urban radicalism, energising in Worcester

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(1) Partisans wore ribbons of these colours at elections.

(2) At the election of 1826 309 Coventry electors came from London to vote, and 333 from 147 places in 25 English counties. In addition, 1 came from Calais. P.P: H.C. 148 (1826-27) iv: Report from the Select Committee on the Coventry Election, p. 240.

(3) T.W. Whitley, The Parliamentary Representation of the City of Coventry (Coventry, 1894), p. 171.

the dissenting opposition to the Anglican corporation. In Coventry the Anglican and dark blue newspaper, Jopson's Coventry Mercury, praised Wilkes at the end of 1768; and at the bye-election in November the cry 'High Church- Glyn and Liberty - Now or Never' was the motto of the old blues in their successful fight against the corporation, making 'an ironic contrast with the usual slogans of liberty at this time'.(1)

This tradition of High Church populism was still strong in the city in 1791 - when, at the time of the Priestley riots in Birmingham, dissenters' meetings in Coventry were broken up and the house of the leading dissenter, the Rev. George Burder, was threatened by a mob (which had to be dispersed by soldiers) when it was rumoured that Priestley was hiding in it. But political forces became realigned in Coventry during the French Wars. From the 1790s onwards there was a radical group in the city which, for example, petitioned in 1795 from the Thistle Inn in West Orchard against the Treasonable Practices Act and the Seditious Meetings Act - a petition presented by Charles James Fox. At the same time, the dissenting corporation was ardently constitutionalist - promoting a rival petition in favour of the two bills of 1795, and joining the Church and Tory party in protestations of loyalty. The two corporation candidates at the election of 1796 stressed, in terms not previously used in Coventry elections, their support for 'that noble system of government which had rendered this happy country the admiration of the world'.(2) Though confusedly, the old division between the Anglican and dissenting interests was becoming increasingly inappropriate: and was in effect recognised as such by the dissenters of the corporation, who admitted Anglicans to membership from about 1800 onwards - so much so that by 1812 they were in the majority and insisted on choosing the Charter officers from among the Anglican interest. Henceforth it was predominantly Anglican, and the hold of the dissenters was broken(3) - though as late as 1826 there were some dissenters among them, their political views then being indistinguishable from those of Anglican

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(1) John Money, 'Taverns, Coffee Houses and Clubs: Local Politics and Popular Articulacy in the Birmingham Area in the Age of the American Revolution', Historical Journal, xiv (1971), pp. 15 et seq, esp. p. 16. See, on this paragraph, Whitley, op.cit., pp. 123 et seq; Romney Sedgwick, The Commons, 1715-1754 (London, 1970) i, pp. 339 et seq; L. Namier and J. Brooke, The Commons, 1754-1790 (London, 1964) i, pp. 400 et seq.

(2) Bodleian Library: Gough Add. Warwickshire, b.2, 'A Chronicle of the Times, being a series of Controversial Election Papers', address of J. Petrie and W. Berners, 23 May 1796.

(3) Bodleian Library: MSS Top. Warwickshire c.4 (MS of William Reader) f.163. The dissenting group received a further setback in 1816, when their leader Basil Goode was found guilty of defrauding the revenue and had to be expelled from the corporation, ibid., f.166.

Tory colleagues.(1)

From the 1790s onwards the old blues too shifted their ground. The religious basis of their dispute with the corporation necessarily waned in importance, and the war itself and its social consequences - especially for the Coventry ribbon trade - became a chief point of argument for the blues. W.W. Bird, old blue M.P. from 1796 to 1802, continued to oppose the 'low church'(2) but drew more support from his promises to strive for peace and a lowering of the price of corn. Bird's successor as champion of the old blues was Peter Moore, M.P. from 1803 onwards.(3) The last evident sign of older allegiances was the tortuous and disingenuous denial in 1806, by one of his supporters, that Moore was in favour of the relief of Catholic disabilities.(4) But by 1812 Moore avowed his support for Catholic Emancipation. At the same time, he made the chief claim to the freemen's votes his opposition for many years to the war.

> Had we, kept out of the war altogether; or had we, in 1799, dictated the conditions of Peace, as we might have done, we should from that time forward ... <u>have commanded Peace throughout the World</u>; and have preserved all that invaluable vital strength, of the blood and treasure of our Empire, which has since been, irrecoverably, sacrificed, and of which we, now, stand so much in need.(5)

The realignment of political forces between 1795 and 1812 meant that many dark blues joined the new corporation party, and many yellows left it and joined the blues. The flux of opinion and loyalty among freemen made elections hard to organise: this was one motive for electoral compacts. Another was the shortage of cash suffered by Peter Moore and the corporation - the latter expending so much money on the contest of 1802(6) that it had to sell its tithes in March 1803. In all the contests after the one held in that month the yellows

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(1) See p. below.

(2) On this point, see C.W.C: Broadsides Collection, <u>To the Worthy Independent Freemen of the City of Coventry</u>, July 1802.

(3) Peter Moore, 1753-1828, was the son of a Cheshire clergyman; he amassed a large fortune in the service of the East India Company. Returning to England, he supplied Burke and Sheridan with material for their attack on Warren Hastings and was an important member of the Foxite Whigs; he proposed Fox in the Westminster election of 1804. He was also an adroit and unscrupulous company promoter. He died in debt in 1828. <u>Dictionary of National Biography</u>, xiii, p. 823.

(4) C.W.C.: Broadsides Collection, 'A Freeman', <u>To the Freemen of the City of Coventry</u>, November 1806.

(5) Gough Add. Warwickshire, b.2, Peter Moore, <u>To the Worthy and Independent Freemen of the City of Coventry</u>, 10 October 1812.

(6) This was fought with great bitterness between the corporation and the old blues: the chief point of issue was the Coventry poor law act of 1801, espoused by the corporation and denounced by the blues as unfavourable to the poor.

and blues in effect coalesced and formed electoral compacts.(1) Thus that election was the last in which the old blues openly opposed corporation mismanagement of the charities.(2) This issue - indeed all issues - on which the corporation and the blues with their reconstructed attitudes were at variance remained latent rather than operative in the years that followed: in which the representation of the city was shared between Moore and the Tory William Mills until 1812, and between Moore and the Tory Joseph Butterworth from then till 1818. How greatly they were divided in principle was to be shown in the election of that year.(3)

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(1) Though independents stood in May 1803 and May 1807 against the compact's candidates.

(2) C.W.C: Broadsides Collection, 'An Independent Citizen', To the Independent Freemen of the City of Coventry, March 1803: The election that the blues had just won 'promises, to the INDEPENDENT FREEMEN OF COVENTRY, a participation in those Charities and Advantages which have been so long and shamefully misapplied'.

(3) For these paragraphs, see T.W. Whitley, op. cit., pp. 202 et seq, and the following broadsides (in addition to those cited): C.W.C: Robert Moy, To Nathaniel Jeffreys Esq, 30 June 1802, 'An Independent Citizen', A Consistant Reply to an Inconsistant Freeman, July 1802; House of Industry, 1802; W.W. Bird, To the Worthy, Independent Freemen of the City of Coventry, March 1803; Queries, Addressed to the Supporters of Mr. Stratton, March 1803; Moore and Liberty, against Corporation Influence, March 1803; W.G. Harris, To the Worthy and Independent Freemen of the City of Coventry, 5 October 1812; P. Moore, To the Worthy and Independent Freemen of the City of Coventry, 4 October 1812; To the Freemen, of the City of Coventry, October 1812. Gough Add. Warwickshire, b.2: To the Freemen of Coventry, 28 September 1812; To the Worthy and Independent Freemen of the City of Coventry, 30 September 1812; Mark Pearman, To the Worthy and Independent freemen of the city of Coventry, 1 October 1812; Joseph Butterworth, To the Independent Freemen of the City of Coventry, 2 October 1812; Coventry Election, 3 October 1812; S. Whitwell, To the Independent Freemen of the City of Coventry, 3 October 1812.

CHAPTER TWO

CHANGE AND CRISIS IN THE RIBBON TRADE, 1815-1830

I

The Organisation of the Ribbon Trade and the Slump after the French Wars

From the early seventeenth century onwards silk ribbons were extensively worn by both sexes of the upper class in England: as decorations on gowns and skirts, gloves and muffs, hats and caps, jackets, doublets and breeches. Towards the end of the century the male use of ribbons declined greatly and in the eighteenth century was restricted for the most part to wigs and hats. Any consequent drop in the demand for ribbons, however, was more than compensated for by their increased use by women, which was especially due to the taking up of the fashions of upper-class females by the classes below them. In the eighteenth century and after, the dresses and hats of ordinary Englishwomen were commonly decorated with ribbons.(1) The popularisation of upper-class tastes, a function of a growing consumer demand, was a familiar occurrence in eighteenth-century England. Where silk ribbons were concerned it led to the steady expansion of the Warwickshire industry. Coventry and the area to the north of the city became in the eighteenth century, and remained in the nineteenth, much the most important centre of silk-ribbon manufacture in Britain: and in the city itself ribbon weaving was the dominant trade until the rise of the bicycle and motor industries in the last third of the nineteenth century.

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(1) J.R. Planché, A Cyclopedia of Costume (2 vols, London, 1876), i, p. 417. F.W. Fairholt, Costume in England ... to the End of the Eighteenth Century (2 vols., 3rd ed., London, 1885), i, pp. 305 et seq. C.W. Cunnington, English Women's Clothing in the Nineteenth Century (London, 1937), passim. D. Yarwood, English Costume (2nd ed., London, 1961), pp. 140 et seq.

The great demand for ribbons was for spring and summer clothes and this gave the Coventry trade the seasonal nature it had throughout its history: autumn and winter were always slack times, after the summer season and before the spring rush. The trade was influenced by fashion too. The highest branches of the ribbon market were for much of the nineteenth century captured and held by French producers: the middle-class and lower-class markets where Coventry predominated were less subject to capricious change. Nevertheless, throughout the nineteenth century it was the habit of male weavers to express baffled rage at the vagaries of female taste. About 1860 a change from ribbons to feathers for trimming hats added somewhat to the considerable troubles the trade was already suffering from. Likewise, a cold spring would diminish the call for ribbons. On the other hand, an election would suddenly and fortuitously raise the demand for partisan ribbons and a state mourning - like that for Princess Charlotte in 1817 - would augment the call for black ribbon; similarly, the fashion for Scottish costume in 1844 meant a brisk trade in tartan ribbons. Unpredictability and precariousness were the dominant themes of the weaver's life.(1)

Throughout its existence the Warwickshire silk ribbon industry depended upon foreign silk, as did the other centres of silk manufacture in Britain. The several attempts to breed silkworms in Britain and reel raw silk from their cocoons were not commercially successful.(2) The mulberry trees that still grow in many gardens in Coventry are believed, in local folklore, to be the result of attempts by artisans to rear silkworms. This can only have been as a hobby; a great number of silkworms was required for the filament in one length of ribbon. As G.R. Porter wrote in 1831: 'Fourteen thousand millions of animated creatures annually live and die to supply this little corner of the world with an article of luxury'.(3) In the early nineteenth century silk was imported from Bengal, China and Italy;

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(1) P.P: [217] H.C. (1840 xxiv: Report of the Royal Commission on the Handloom Weavers, Assistant Commissioners' Reports, Part iv, Midland District, pp. 15 et seq, 34; H.C. 134 (1818) ix: Minutes of Evidence of the Select Committee on the Silk Ribbon Weavers' Petitions, p.11. Joseph Gutteridge, Lights and Shadows in the Life of an Artisan (Coventry, 1893), p. 202. Coventry Standard, 14 April 1837, 11 October 1844.

(2) Sir Frank Warner, The Silk Industry of the United Kingdom: Its Origin and Development (London, 1921), pp. 440 et seq. Count Enrico Dandolo, The Art of Rearing Silkworms (London, 1825), pp. iii et seq. Coventry Herald, 9 December 1825. G.R. Porter, A Treatise on the Origin, Progressive Improvement, and Present State of the Silk Manufacture (London, 1831), pp. 40 et seq. Silk Supply: A Handbook of the History of Silk, the Rearing of the Silkworm, and the Culture of the Mulberry Tree (Coventry, c.1861), pp. 29 et seq. These sources describe sundry unsuccessful attempts to rear silkworms in Slough, Cork and Coventry.

(3) G.R. Porter, op. cit., p. 43.

the silk imported from France was of Italian origin too, since the export of native French silk was forbidden. China silk does not seem to have been much used by the ribbon industry. About 1830 the cheapest ribbons were made from Bengal silk, more expensive ones from a mixture of Bengal and Italian, and the most expensive from Italian alone. In the middle of the eighteenth century the quality of Bengal silk was so low that very little was imported though it cost only one half or even one third as much as Italian silk. The East India Company set about trying to improve its quality, installing in Bengal filatures (establishments for reeling silk from the cocoons) of the Italian pattern. The quality and price of Bengal silk rose and so after 1812 did the quantity imported. By 1820 the cost of raw Bengal silk was 15s. 1b. and of raw Italian or Chinese 19s. 6d. The best Bengal was thought equal to the Italian.(1)

In 1820 most silk was imported in raw form: not, that is, in cocoons - these were not brought in - but in threads reeled off the cocoon after its natural gum had been loosened by hot water. The silk was then thrown: the prime thread was twisted to prepare it for manufacture. One thread twisted was, naturally, called a single. Two or more threads twisted together were called tram, which was used for the weft or shute (sometimes spelled 'shoot'). Organzine, made by twisting several threads individually and then together, was used for the warp. After the silk was thrown, the natural gum was boiled out. There was much loss of weight during the throwing process, but a gain in bulk, sheen and softness. Much silk was imported ready thrown. The silk was then dyed in the hank. Winding came next; silk in the hank was wound on to bobbins. Organzine was then warped; several organzine threads were brought together by the aid of a warping machine to form the warp. The tram or shute was filled after winding; the bobbins of tram were wound upon the pins successively inserted in the shuttle as the silk in them was spent. The silk was then ready for weaving.(2)

Ribbon was woven in lengths of thirty-six yards, on several types of loom. The oldest, and the simplest, was the single-hand loom, a version of the common handloom but less robust than the variety

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(1) ibid., pp. 50, 70 et seq., 231. P.P: H.C. 703 (1821) vii: Second Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords, appointed to inquire into the Means of extending and securing the Foreign Trade, pp. 3, 33, 39.

(2) G.R. Porter, op. cit., pp. 196 et seq. P.P: [217] H.C. (1840) ssiv, p. 36.

used for the weaving of woollen cloth. Its name came from the fact that it was limited to producing one width or ribbon at a time. About 1770 the Dutch engine-loom was introduced into Coventry. This loom, invented in the late sixteenth century (possibly in Danzig) and at that time capable of weaving four or six ribbons simultaneously, was progressively improved until by 1830 it could weave more than twenty-eight widths at once, though weavers rarely exceeded that number. The term engine-loom was misleading: it was worked by the hands and feet as was the single-hand loom. The Jacquard apparatus, invented in 1801 by a Lyons weaver and introduced into Coventry about 1823, was a complicated mechanism that was attached to the top of the engine-loom and adapted it for the production of much more elaborate ribbons than previously it had been suitable for. Thus, strictly speaking, the Jacquard loom was an improved version of the engine-loom. Several types of steam power-loom (of which the a-la-bar loom was one) were used for the weaving of ribbons; the first steam loom was introduced into Coventry in 1831.(1)

Apart from differences of colour, the ribbons woven in Warwickshire varied greatly in fabric, texture and width. Plain ribbons were

> plain satins, sarcenets, gauzes and pads of all colours, and also ... "loves" which are chiefly gauze and satin, in stripes of mourning colours. The fancy trade consists in the manufacture of the same fabrics with figures of various texture ... One class of fancy ribbons are of homogeneous texture, but various colours, - clouded, barred, or plaided. Another consists of the Chinas and China gauzes.(2)

These ribbons were made in various widths, measured in deniers, called 'pennies' in Coventry and abbreviated to 'dy'. A sixpenny or 6dy breadth was about one inch, 18dy about two and a half inches. Plain ribbons were made in widths of from 1dy to 30dy; figured ribbons were wider, varying between 20dy and 40dy, the latter measuring about six inches across. Plain ribbons were woven on single-hand looms with several treadles or on Jacquard looms.(3)

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(1) G.R. Porter, op. cit., pp. 212 et seq. Charles Singer et al., eds., A History of Technology, iii (Oxford, 1957), pp. 167 et seq; iv (Oxford, 1958), p. 316. Coventry Herald, 30 March 1832. P.P: H.C. 678 (1831-32) xix: Report and Minutes of Evidence of the Select Committee on the Silk Trade, p. 70; [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 5. J. Gutteridge, op. cit., pp. 93 et seq.

(2) P.P: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 13 et seq.

(3) ibid., pp. 6 et seq, 236 et seq.

In 1818 a detailed census was taken of the ribbon trade. This is given below. It shows clearly the topography of the trade - its wide distribution in the north of Warwickshire. It shows clearly too that the city of Coventry itself was the most important ribbon area - especially because of the concentration there of more than two thirds of the most productive looms, the engine-looms.

TABLE III: Looms and Weavers in the Warwickshire Ribbon Trade, 1818(1)

	Looms			Weavers				
	Engine Looms	Single Hand Looms	Total of Looms	Males	Females	Total of Weavers	Total of Warpers and Winders	Total of workers in the ribbon trade
Coventry	2260	1008	3268	2089	1406	3495	1478	4973
Foleshill	110	1662	1732	790	1129	1919	625	2544
Bedworth	26	1007	1033	600	538	1138	519	1657
Nuneaton	500	1000	1500	1010	590	1600	850	2450
Coton	12	110	122	69	83	152	51	203
Atherstone		70	70	57	51	108	31	139
Bulkington	15	160	175	95	190	285	104	389
Ryton	2	60	62	48	34	82	31	113
Stoke	29	54	83	43	60	103	23	126
Stocking-ford	9	110	119	66	73	139	80	219
Sowe	10	108	118	68	80	148	46	194
Ansty	5	30	35	25	30	55	14	69
Exhall	1	15	16	12	19	31	7	38
Barnacle	17	50	67	40	47	87	21	108
Shilton		36	36	18	22	40	11	51
Keresley	12	43	55	26	33	59	14	73
	3008	5483	8491	5056	4385	9441	3905	13,346

(1) Source of table: P.P: H.C. 134 (1818) ix, p. 7.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the silk was bought on credit of ten months or more from London silk brokers - some of whom, like Enoch Durant of Huguenot stock, dealt with manufacturers in many parts of the country; he sold to the makers of various silk fabrics in Macclesfield, Manchester, Spitalfields, Kidderminster, and Norwich, the hosiery manufacturers of Derby and Nottingham, the sewing-silk men of Leek, and the ribbon masters of Coventry. At the start of the century there were about twenty-five or thirty of these in Coventry and one or two more in Nuneaton. They were merchants rather than manufacturers, men of property and capital, with warehouses in London for their ribbon stock. Many of the principal masters lived in London, keeping in Coventry an agent who lived in a small house one room of which was used as a warehouse; here the silk was given out and the finished ribbons packed up to be sent to the manufacturer in London. Thomas Bibbins Stanbridge was one such; he lived in Cheapside and made broad silks in Spitalfields and ribbons in Warwickshire, where he employed 400 men. Holding, Wornham and Pears were another large firm of masters, with, in 1818, 60 engine-looms and 300 single-hand looms in the city. The father of Charles Bray, friend of George Eliot, radical, phrenologist and ideologue, was a ribbon manufacturer in Coventry who 'made a considerable fortune' and left on his death in 1835 a lucrative business to Charles and seven other children well provided for; on his marriage in 1836 Charles began housekeeping with £1,200 a year, a town and a country house, and a carriage. The trade had been depressed for most of the preceding twenty years.(1)

The masters gave out the silk in the hank to the dyers, and then to the undertakers or master weavers. These apparently owned all the looms and often too their houses and loom-shops. They fetched the silk from the manufacturers and once a week took in the finished ribbons or sent them by carrier. They were responsible for the training and upbringing of their apprentices, who lived in their houses as members of their families. They superintended all the stages of manufacture: the winding and warping, always performed by women and

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(1) P.P: H.C. 211 and 278 (1818) ix: Second Report and Minutes of Evidence of the Select Committee on the Silk Ribbon Weavers' Petitions, pp. 57, 122 et seq., 183; H.C. 134 (1818) ix, pp. 5 et seq; H.C. 703 (1821) vii, p.9; [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 33 et seq. Journals of the House of Commons, lxxii (1817), p. 236. Charles Bray, Phases of Opinion and Experience during a Long Life (London, pp. 2, 20, 48, 159.

children, usually from the undertakers' own families, and the weaving itself, carried out by women or journeymen on the undertakers' looms. Most of the looms were in the undertakers' own shops. Of the male journeymen who worked for the undertakers, nearly all (at least of those who were from Coventry itself) had served an indentured seven-year apprenticeship, almost always with an undertaker, occasionally with another journeyman. From the interest-free loans of £50 for nine years available from Sir Thomas White's charity, or since sureties were necessary for these, more usually from sums advanced by masters and repayable from earnings, some journeymen bought looms and became undertakers. In 1818 a single-hand loom cost £5 and an engine-loom £20.(1) By convention males alone worked on the engine-loom; women were confined to the less remunerative single-hand loom. About the turn of the century an attempt by a journeyman to get his wife employed on the engine-loom led to a weavers' strike.

> The men, succeeding in preventing it, had a "goose-riding", which, among the Coventry sports, was then a common mode of celebrating a victory: a live goose was hung by its legs from a rope across the street, with its neck greased, and the fun consisted in running at and retaining its neck in the hand if possible.(2)

The journeymen's houses were often 'very wretched'. And 'scarcely a year passed without serious want of employment at some period of it, and frequently more than half the men were out of work and in the greatest distress, especially from the latter end of October till towards Spring'.(3) Nor were relations between masters and men always smooth. The silk manufacturers paid the undertakers according to a 'list of prices' (that is, piecework rates) and the undertakers deducted one third of the price for use of shop and loom and as payment for winding and warping, thus paying the journeymen two-thirds for weaving and the minor tasks, like shute-filling, that accompanied it.(4)

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(1) P.P: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 33 et seq; H.C. 134 (1818) ix, p. 8; H.C. 606 (1834) xxii: 28th Report of the Charity Commissioner pp. 172 et seq. Joseph Gutteridge, op. cit., p. 60.

(2) P.P: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 33.

(3) ibid., pp. 33 et seq. The statement in J.Prest, The Industrial Revolution in Coventry (Oxford, 1960), p. 44, that the summer was the slack period is given no precise documentary reference. It appears to be based on a misreading of the source cited in this footnote. J. Gutteridge, op. cit., p. 98, mentions December as a month in which 'trade was invariably depressed'.

(4) P.P: H.C. 134 (1818) ix, p. 8; [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 33 et seq.

The system led to disputes, as are evidenced by the petition to the House of Commons in 1799 'of several persons ... on behalf of themselves and others ... manufacturers, undertakers, artizans engaged in ribbon manufacturing in Warwickshire and in the City and the County of the City of Coventry'. They complained of difficulties and inconveniences that had resulted from the lack of any 'power of properly fixing, settling and regulating wages, pay and the price of labour' and asked for leave to introduce a bill to gain such powers.(1) Six years later a United Committee of Ribbon Weavers aimed at maintaining the list of prices and at protecting journeyhands from low wages.(2) And in January 1813 the undertakers and single-hand weavers (at all times the least remunerated branch of the trade) complained that:

> Your humble Petitioners are pressed very hard to provide for themselves and Families, by the present HIGH PRICES of PROVISIONS and other Necessaries of Life; while other Handicraftsmen and Labourers are receiving increased Wages to support them, your Petitioners' Earnings are in a decreasing Ratio ... an Increase in the Prices of the respective Articles of Ribbons manufactured by the Single-hand Weavers are considered very necessary to support and ameliorate their Situation.(3)

Nevertheless, during the war years the weavers were more fortunate than afterwards they were to become, in two crucial respects: it was unusual for manufacturers to depart from the list of prices, and it was customary during times of depression for manufacturers to have fewer ribbons woven and so maintain the usual price for them. Neither the prime price paid to the undertaker nor the proportion paid to the

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(1) Journals of the House of Commons, liv (1798-1799), pp. 215, 548 et seq., 606, 675. Journals of the House of Lords, xlii (1798-1800), pp. 281 et seq, 323 et seq. Parliamentary Register, ix, p. 561, 8 July 1799. The petition was referred to a committee, from which in May 1799 William Wilberforce Bird (M.P. for Coventry) reported in favour of the objects of the petition. He and a colleague prepared a bill to give the justices of the peace the powers wanted by the ribbon trade; the bill passed all stages in the Commons but was rejected at its third reading in the Lords owing to the intervention of the Lord Chancellor. He 'stated his objections to all such bills as the Coventry Labour Bill and instanced the effects of the Spitalfields Weavers' Wages bill to prove the mischievous tendency of bills to regulate the price of manufacturers' labour'.

(2) Coventry Mercury, 9 December 1805, 22 December 1806.

(3) C.W.C.: Broadsides Collection, To the Masters, Manufacturers in the Ribbon Trade, 18 January 1813.

journeyman tended to vary. Likewise, the masters sold their ribbons by one agreed list, with 30% discount for cash.(1) It is clear that in general the industry was governed by conventions of paternalism and a complaisant, uncompetitive neighbourliness: which, encouraged by physical proximity in a town no larger than one mile across at its widest (as Thomas Sharp's plan of 1807 shows) could be well afforded by masters enjoying long credit from their brokers and a stable, gentlemanly affluence, and challenged by no harsh pressures to change their ways of life and business. Nor were the weavers able to improve their relative position by concerted action: working as they did in a trade with sufficient labour to meet demand and indeed overstocked during the winter season.

Changes came during the Napoleonic Wars. Many young weavers entered the army, and during the 'big purl time' that began in 1812, when the vagaries of fashion led to a heavy demand for ribbon with big purl edges, there was not enough labour to meet it. Weavers were able to demand an advance in prices and did so; the masters conceded one, for the single-hand trade at least, in February 1813. They were apparently prepared to pay above even this new list to get ribbons woven.(2) There was also a more fundamental change. For some years there had been in the single-hand trade to the north of the city a system called 'half-pay apprenticeship': a spurious bond, sealed by a contract usually oral in nature, varying widely in its terms, broken with impunity, and leading to no recognised status: indeed even regular apprentices indentured to masters outside the city and its suburbs did not qualify for the civic freedom and its privileges. Both girls and boys had been admitted to half-pay apprenticeships at the age of ten or more and had been set to weave immediately. The apprentice was not taken into the master's house, but maintained himself and was paid at half the usual rate for a weaver: he received, that is, one third of the list price, while the master weaver retained two thirds, his extra apportionment being nominally for teaching the craft. During the 'big purl time' the system of half-pay apprenticeship was extended by masters eager to catch the boom. Indentures were for as little as two years and were unstamped. Girls could earn more as half-pay apprentices than as servants and some left their positions as gentlemen's servants in the

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(1) P.P.: H.C. 134 (1818) ix, p. 15; H.C. 211 and 278 (1818) ix, pp. 126 et seq; [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 34, 198.

(2) P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 5, 34, 198. C.W.C.: Broadsides Collection, List of Prices of 15 February 1813.

country to become weavers. Some girls who had been warpers and winders became weavers. Women were now employed on both types of loom and the male monopoly of the engine loom was broken.

This last change occurred in Coventry as well as in the northern parishes. In the city, however, there was no large number of outdoor (that is, half-pay) apprentices and even fewer on irregular indentures. These last were almost entirely girls. Boys and their parents desired regular seven-year indentures because only these brought the coveted freedom. And in the city the masters and journeymen to whom the apprentices were bound kept tenaciously to the custom of indoor apprenticeship because the requirement of residence entailed an effective check upon numbers entering the trade.(1) But the increase in irregularly indentured and half-pay apprentices outside the city - and the employment of women on the engine loom within it - show the Coventry weavers' inability to control admissions (and hence their prosperity) over the industry as a whole.(2)

At the peace the boom ended. It had been partly due to the strength of exports, many of them to the U.S.A., during the war, when the British blockade prevented the export of French ribbons. After the war the export market largely disappeared because of French competition. French ribbons, said one Coventry manufacturer in 1818, could be imported by his brother in Baltimore at 40% below the Coventry price. Yet the home market remained generally good - except early in 1817 - and there was usually plenty of weaving to be had. This was reflected in the continued high price of silk. The post-war crisis was thus due far less to defective demand than to an excess of labour. The labour market had been overstocked with hands to meet

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(1) See section VI of this chapter for a discussion of this question.

(2) P.P: H.C. 134 (1818) ix, pp. 4 et seq; [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 5, 34, 44 et seq. Coventry's trades were unaffected by Onslow's bill of 1814 that repealed the apprenticeship clauses of the Statute of Artificers. The Statute did not apply to trades that had arisen since Elizabethan times, like ribbon weaving and watchmaking. 'Masters, journeymen, mechanics, artificers and handicraftsmen' from Coventry petitioned against the bill: but so they did from many places similarly unaffected. Peter Moore, the city's M.P., spoke against the bill several times as a vehement supporter of artisans' rights. Parliamentary Debates, xxvii, pp. 423 et seq, 566 et seq, 883. Journals of the House of Commons, lxix (1813-14), p. 185. T.K. Derry, 'The Repeal of the Apprenticeship Clauses of the Statute of Artificers', Economic History Review, iii (1931-32), p. 80. The Weavers' Committee petitioned in 1831 against the practice of taking apprentices on irregular indentures, for less than seven years. T.B. Fyler, then M.P., introduced a bill to forbid the practice; it was however dropped at the report stage. Journals of the House of Commons, lxxxv (1830), pp. 415 et seq. Parliamentary Debates, new series, xxiv (1830), p. 704. But irregular indentures remained rare even so in the city itself.

the exceptional conditions of the boom, and at the peace demobilisation added again to the number of weavers. The tradition of the industry in this sort of situation was to share work - to reduce the amount of ribbon woven and to maintain the usual price for work done. This custom now ended.(1)

In the post-war slump, the various elements in the industry were locked in a struggle for profit and survival. Many of the undertakers who had been induced during the boom to manufacture on their own account failed: but they were replaced by others prepared to hazard all at a time of falling incomes by setting up as masters, on credit. They were encouraged by the ribbon wholesalers of London and Manchester, anxious to defend their profits by cutting out the middlemen silk-masters. As these were threatened they sought their security in cutting out the undertakers and giving out work directly to journeymen. In this way in a few years three quarters of the engine trade were removed from the undertaking system, which survived only in the rural parishes to the north of the city.

In this conflict the ribbon wholesalers and the old-established silk masters survived but

> the whole trade of the undertaker, or master weaver, was thus rapidly forced out of existence; those undertakers who could, became little masters; and those who could not, had no resort but to take journeywork on the new system. The journeymen, as a class, were thus annihilated ... All who remained mere journeymen, or journeymen's journeymen, as they are now called, under the new system, were reduced to a much lower position than they formerly held; but the journeyman at 'first-hand', who became proprietor of his own loom, and perhaps of one or two more, and who received his work direct from the warehouse of the manufacturers (by whom the winding and warping were done on his own premises) had acquired, in his little capital, an ingredient of respectability which promised to yield him the means of comfort, if not of advancement.(2)

But in the short term apparent to all groups in Coventry was the hardship to which the bitter competition in the industry had reduced them. For (as Fletcher himself pointed out) under the stimulus of new men, the wholesalers and some undertakers turned masters, the 'ancient bonds' by which the 'local capitalist ... had allowed himself to be fettered' were broken, 'and competition was extended in its full

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(1) P.P: H.C. 134 (1818) ix, pp. 5 et seq; H.C. 211 and 278 (1818) ix, pp. 69, 129, 186.

(2) P.P: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp.34 et seq. These words were written by Joseph Fletcher, assistant commissioner for the Royal Commission on the Handloom Weavers, and an exponent of the virtues of competitive capitalism. See also ibid., p. 198 and P.P.: H.C. 134 (1818) ix, pp. 8, 37.

force to the price of labour as well as to the extent of employment which a journeyman should get from his master'.(1)

There was a general abandonment of the list of prices, 'honourable' masters who wished to continue to pay by it finding themselves defeated by the inexorable competition of other men. The ill-rewarded labour of the half-pay apprentices was the most obvious means by which the earnings of adult male weavers were steadily reduced. John Robinson was not a noticeably generous ribbon manufacturer, paying his single-hand loom weavers by rates that brought them only 5s.6d. a week in the slump; his engine-loom weavers earned only 10s. at the same time. Nevertheless, he found ribbons on sale in London at 17% or 20% less than he could make them for; the reason was that employers of half-pay apprentices paid 30% less than he for an equivalent amount of work.(2)

The lower the weaver's position in the functional hierarchy, the worse was his fate during the slump. John Dalby, a Coventry undertaker in the engine-loom branch who did not attempt to become a 'little master', earned in 1818 about 10s. a week on his own loom and no more than £1 a week (after paying for winding and warping) in profits on, it seems, five or six others. His rent was £8 a year, his window-tax £2.14s., and he had five children to support. He had to crave relief from paying his poor rate.(3) The first-hand journeyman whose position Fletcher later thought had been somewhat enviable found in 1816, 1817 and 1818, as did the journeymen's journeymen below them, that their earnings had dropped greatly since the boom years shortly before. In 1814 engine-loom weavers in Coventry earned £1 or a guinea a week; three or four years later they earned, even when working for a generous master, only 12s. or 14s. a week. At the same time weavers in the city on the single-hand loom could earn with the same employer between 6s. and 8s.6d. a week, for twelve or fourteen hours work on each of six days. By other masters in the city engine-loom weavers were paid only 10s. a week and single-hand loom weavers 5s.6d., for fourteen hours work a day. Earnings dropped similarly in north Warwickshire; the single-hand loom weavers of Foleshill could earn, in 1818, only 5s.6d. a week for fourteen or even more hours of work a day. Worst of all was the plight of the half-pay apprentices. They earned, on

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(1) P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 35, 198 et seq.

(2) P.P.: H.C. 134 (1818) ix, pp. 4 et seq; H.C. 211 and 278 (1818) ix, pp. 123 et seq.

(3) P.P.: H.C. 134 (1818) ix, pp. 21 et seq.

average, 3s. a week; yet most of them worked on the engine-loom.(1)

These earnings represent a catastrophic drop of 40% or 50% (in the case of the engine-loom weavers quoted) from those of the boom a few years before - a decline far greater than the concurrent drop in the cost of living, however this may be measured.(2) More significantly, they represent a decline in earnings and real income (at least for the engine-loom weavers) as compared with the years before the boom. Peter Gregory and John Dalby, undertakers, stated in 1818 that twenty years before weekly earnings had been £1 in the engine trade and 10s. in the single-hand trade; at the same time Samuel Makins, a ribbon master, agreed with their figure for the earnings of an engine-loom weaver at the end of the eighteenth century.(3) All three were attempting to demonstrate to a select committee that there had been a long-term decline in earnings and their evidence may therefore be regarded sceptically. A more conservative estimate was that of Abraham Herbert, ribbon manufacturer of Little Park Street, who in 1838 stated that early in the century single-hand weavers had earned, in full employ, at best 6s.8d. a week and engine-loom weavers 16s. or 18s. a week. There is abundant testimony to the poverty of the single-hand weaver at all times; his real earnings were probably no lower in 1818 (if he were in full employ) than they had been twenty years earlier. The engine-loom weaver's were: even on Herbert's cautious estimate, the engine weaver's earnings had dropped by at least one quarter, and often by much more. This drop was considerably more than that of the cost of living over the same term(4)

The weaving area slid into misery. Many of the half-pay apprentices became prostitutes. Weavers who had been affluent drew on their savings, mortgaged their houses, or were partly sustained for some time by their benefit clubs, which paid out £2,681 between 1814 and 1818. There was more help from the city charities, which disbursed £3,000 a year. In 1817 £3,300 was subscribed to a distress fund to buy soup and bread for the poor of the city. The freemen

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(1) P.P.: H.C. 134 (1818) ix, pp. 7, 17, 32 et seq; H.C. 211 and 278 (1818) ix, pp. 122 et seq, 172.

(2) B.R. Mitchell and P. Deane, Abstract of British Historical Statistics (Cambridge, 1962), pp. 468 et seq.

(3) P.P.: H.C. 134 (1818) ix, pp. 7, 22; H.C. 211 and 278 (1818) ix, p. 126.

(4) P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 273. Mitchell and Deane, loc. cit.

weavers disliked accepting poor relief; they lost the franchise if they did.(1) Yet the poor rate burden rose steadily in the combined parishes of St. Michael and Holy Trinity, as the tables in the appendix show. Since accommodation in the House of Industry was of course limited, it is the increase in the number of families receiving outdoor relief which is most telling. It is hard to translate their numbers into a total of individuals, but in the summer of 1817 John Carter (town clerk and a director of the poor) estimated that there were nearly 6,000 outpoor in the combined parishes: that one-third of the population was receiving outdoor relief. Using the same multiplier as he (that is, five) one estimates that in January 1817 the 1600 families comprising the outpoor totalled 8,000 people - or more than half the population of the combined parishes. Significantly, the radicals of the city declared in January 1817 that 'nearly half' Coventry's population was then subsisting on poor relief and the 'charitable contribution of individuals'.(2) In addition, many people in work were too poor to pay the poor rate and successfully 'craved' relief from their rates; so that the burden on those who did pay was all the greater. At the same time, the poor rate in the contiguous (and entirely agricultural) parish of Stivichall was merely 1s.5d. It is not surprising that the Directors of the Poor had that year to reduce their repayment of the outstanding capital debt on the workhouse from the usual £500 to £50 owing to the 'extreme pressure of the times', or that they feared the breakdown of the poor law system in the city unless the burden of relief were spread over neighbouring parishes.(3) North of the city also the burden of the poor rate grew: in Foleshill the rate was 9s. in 1816 and 15s. in 1817; in Bedworth the rate was 7s. in 1815, 13.6d. in 1817, 12s. in 1818; in Nuneaton the rate increased to 16s.6d. in 1817 from 9s. the year before, and at one time over 2,000 out of a population of 6,000 were being relieved.(4)

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(1) P.P.: H.C. 134 (1818) ix, pp. 4 et seq; H.C. 211 and 278 (1818) ix, pp. 131 et seq; H.C. 400 (1818) v: Report and Minutes of Evidence of the House of Lords Committee on the Poor Laws, p. 195.

(2) P.P.: H.C. 462 (1817) vi: Report from the Select Committee on the Poor Laws, with the Minutes of Evidence, p. 142. C.W.C.: Broadsides Collection, At a most numerous and respectable Meeting, 28 January 1817. Carter said in 1818 that seven tenths of those receiving poor relief were ribbon workers: P.P.: H.C. 134 (1818) ix, p. 13.

(3) C.R.O.: Proceedings of the Guardians of the Poor, p. 104. P.P.: H.C. 462 (1817) vi, pp. 139 et seq; H.C. 400 (1818) v, pp. 193 et seq. Journals of the House of Commons, lxxii (1817), pp. 235 et seq.

(4) P.P.: H.C. 134 (1818) ix, p. 21; H.C. 211 and 278 (1818) ix, pp. 129, 186.

II

Attempts to regain Prosperity, 1816-1823

In the first year of the slump, 1816, a Weavers' Committee was in existence. The weavers pressed for renewed adherence by their masters to the list of prices, holding meetings in their 'great arena', the Hill and Hollow Close. At length seventy-eight of the Coventry masters, six in Nuneaton, and two in Bedworth (comprising nearly all the principal masters) agreed to appoint three 'respectable persons from our own body to meet three respectable undertakers, and do hereby promise and agree to pay such prices as they shall mutually fix upon at such meeting'. The two deputations met at the Castle Inn (the site of many more similar meetings in future years) and then agreed on lists for both the single-hand and engine trades, on 26 September 1816. The lists were to operate from I October. A printed engine list does not seem to survive from before 1816 and comparison is thus possible only in the single-hand trade, with the list of 1813. This shows an advance in the prices for some ribbons and a decline for others, but the general impression is that the 1816 list was very slightly lower.(1)

Both sides appeared pleased with this outcome to the weavers' campaign:

> The undertakers' deputation beg leave, in justice to the masters, to say, that amid the gloom of the present hour, in the multitude of calamities that weigh down our spirits, they feel consolation from the result of the above conference, in having it in their power to state the very honourable desire of the masters' deputation to meet the same persons at a more favourable period, and affix prices more beneficial both to the employer and the employed.(2)

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(1) P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 199 et seq, 236 et seq; H.C. 134 (1818) ix, pp. 8 et seq.

(2) P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 200.

And (wrote Fletcher later),

> to most of the manufacturers, especially those of larger capital, it was a subject rather of gratulation to have a fixed list of prices, as was the old habit of the trade, without fear of the advantage being gained by another who should underpay them.(1)

But the 1816 list did not last a week before it was dropped by some masters, and it was abandoned by all masters by the spring of 1817.(2) At one extreme stood those few masters who refused to sign the list at all. Next to them were the men who dropped it before the ink was dry; for them, plainly, the act of signing was never more than a ritual observance. At the other extreme were the master manufacturers who after the list had started to collapse responded favourably to an approach made to them by two colleagues, John Robinson and J. Sargeant, in November 1816.

> We have long lamented the want of confidence in maintaining former regulations, the increasing deviations from a standard price, and the growing disposition to obtain a paltry profit, at the expense of truth, justice, and humanity. To give such a price to your workmen as will not enable them to procure the common necessaries of life is evidently cruel and impolitic, inasmuch as it has a tendency to increase pauperism, and depress industry; and it is to be feared the badness of trade, the alarming price of provisions, and the extreme distress which prevails among the workmen, will increase the principle which we deprecate, as it is generally found that the disposition to oppress keeps pace with the inability of the sufferer to make a becoming resistance. We rejoice that honourable exceptions may be found among individuals who have invariably conformed to the last regulation; but the competition in trade is too great to admit of those who are disposed to be the friends of the weavers conforming to the prices, while others are daily making a profit of their distresses.
>
> We had made these remarks prior to seeing an address to the trade from the Weavers' Committee, suggesting the desirableness and necessity of obtaining an Act of Parliament to regulate the price of labour, and to render those prices binding.
>
> The object appears to us desirable, and the only effectual remedy which can be applied.(3)

Robinson thus approached the ribbon manufacturers with a view to getting their support for such an act. The seventeen manufacturers who signed a declaration of support (amounting in all to about one fifth or one sixth of the trade) were the committed paternalists of the silk-ribbon industry - those who were willing to do more than merely acquiesce in a list when pressed to by their neighbours, and who abandoned the list only with reluctance.(4)

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(1) loc. cit.

(2) P.P.: H.C. 134 (1818) ix, p. 11.

(3) P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) p. 200. Robinson himself was forced by competition to pay below the list price.

(4) P.P.: H.C. 134 (1818) ix, pp. 24, 35.

Yet paternalism survived strongly in the city at large. In August 1817 several hundred citizens, among them many of the most prominent men in the city, and the paternalist ribbon masters, addressed the manufacturers who were refusing to pay by the list: and who ignored the address totally - indeed reduced wages yet again after it.

> When the prices were regulated, fixed and agreed by the trade, provisions were not more than one-half the price they are at the present time. Then it was not necessary, nor even contemplated, to assess the journeyman weaver to pay to the poor rates; but now he is called on, with the tradesman, for this and various other taxes ... Now, while the weaver is incapacitated to support his own house, while he is reduced to indigence, to beggary, to starvation, let it be remembered, the retailer of every description is suffering in a commensurate degree. The pressure of poor rates must increase, and the means of supporting the accumulating burthen be daily diminishing. In a word, the reduction of the price of labour below the standard of equity is a burthen which presses upon the whole body, and tends ultimately to crush our city into wretchedness and ruin. ..... You cannot re-animate exhausted Europe, and circulate the commercial stream through all her veins; but you can forbear to lash and cut the starving poor that dwell around you; - yea, you could a little alleviate their woe by fairly paying a price for their labour.(1)

Doubtless it was their feeling that the city as a whole supported them which encouraged in the weavers' movement of these years its pervasive moderation and a continued faith in the power of constitutional redress. Weavers articulated a respect and regard for their masters and a belief that their interests could be reconciled by amicable negotiation. The great majority of weavers seem to have behaved as though the conventions of paternalism were far more widely operative than in fact they now were.

The influence of the Weavers' Committee was exerted to prevent violence. Towards the end of 1817 the demand for mourning ribbons that followed the death of PrincessCharlotte led the weavers to 'conceive they had then an opportunity of withholding their employment from the loom until themasters would conform to their formal engagement'. Peter Gregory, one of the weavers' leaders, commented that

> this only produced scenes which might have tended to the dishonour of the weavers in general. At the instance of some applying to me for advice how to proceed, I desired them not to take illegal measures; for I said, You will remember that not a single instance of tumult or disorder has yet been recorded or can be proved against us; then let us proceed in the same humble, legal and honest manner in which we have done, and I trust that I have in my possession an Act of Parliament by which you may redress your own grievances.

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(1) P.P.: H.C. 134 (1818) ix, pp. 27 et seq.

The act was 39 and 40 Geo. III, c.106, one of the Combination Acts. Clause 18 permitted masters and workmen in dispute over wages - or either party - to require arbitrators appointed by both parties to decide upon the question; in the arbitrators' default a justice of the peace could be required by either party to adjudicate. Gregory found, however, that for the most part the law was of little use to the weavers, since when there was a glut of labour unscrupulous masters could get around any enforced raising of piece-work rates that was attempted by dismissing the weavers who insisted on arbitration and employing others. 'The general reason for weavers not applying to magistrates to redress their grievances was, that if they did so, they were certain of losing what little employment and small wages they received next week.'(1)

By the beginning of 1818 the weavers realised that it was impossible to gain satisfactory results from the existing law on arbitration, or a lasting voluntary subscription by the masters to the list of prices. They returned in earnest to the idea mooted in 1816 of obtaining an act of Parliament 'to regulate the price of labour, and to render those prices binding'.(2) A committee was formed by the weavers and undertakers to carry out the plan and subscriptions were obtained from the trade throughout north Warwickshire. The corporation subscribed too. Some of the masters favoured an approach to Parliament and the treasurer of the subscribed fund was Charles Adams, 'the acknowledged head of the trade'.(3) In February the weavers of Coventry petitioned the Commons complaining of 'a loose, impolitic, and ruinous system of Apprenticeship', and stressing the need for 'a certain rule for adequate wages ... for giving a chance to the fair manufacturer to meet his competitor at market'. It asked for a bill to remedy or limit the half-pay system and to enable both masters and men 'to regulate and make uniform, the prices and wages for labour'. The petition was introduced by Peter Moore, who with aid from Dugdale Stratford Dugdale, one of the county members, got it referred to a select committee.(4)

The campaign committee now strove to gain wide support for its case, making application 'to every person whose influence it deemed might be obtained'. A printed letter was circulated. The committee

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(1) P.P.: H.C. 134 (1818) ix, pp. 11 et seq.

(2) P.P. [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 200.

(3) P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 200 et seq. C.W.C.: Broadsides Collection, To the Ribbon Weavers of Coventry, 10 January 181

(4) Journals of the House of Commons, lxxiii (1818), pp. 51 et seq. Parliamentary Debates, xxxvii, pp. 395 et seq.

was aided by the corporation in its task, the town clerk becoming its chief agent in London. As a result of these efforts several petitions were presented to the Commons from the silk weavers of Macclesfield, Leek, Reading and Manchester, detailing the same grievances. In their plea to the select committee of the Commons the weavers were strongly supported by Carter, speaking for the Corporation, and by the weavers from elsewhere; they asked for the Spitalfields Acts to be extended. It was admitted that this would cause a rise in the price of ribbons: but it would be a slight one which the consumers of a luxury could well afford to pay. Several Warwickshire manufacturers supported the plea - John Robinson, William Pears, Samuel Makins, William Newsom, Stephen Stanley, Thomas Stanbridge, John Ames and William Elliott. The majority did not. The most that one can say for the Coventry masters is that the fact that they did not petition or speak against statutory regulation implies a sort of hostile neutrality on the question - rather different from the vehement opposition of most of the manufacturers of Lancashire and Cheshire.(1) This showed the impossibilit of attaining that concord in the silk trade without which an extension of the Spitalfields Acts - in any case difficult in a climate increasingly inimical to paternalist regulation - became a mere chimera.

Meanwhile, the influence of the select committee's chairman, Peter Moore, is discernible in the bias of its report, which recommended the extension to the provinces, at least for a few years as an experiment, of the Spitalfields and Dublin Acts.(2)

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(1) P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 201; H.C. 134 (1818) ix, pp. 4 et seq, 30 et seq; H.C. 211 and 278 (1818) ix, pp. 63 et seq, 87 et seq, 108 et seq, 122 et seq. Journals of the House of Commons, lxxiii (1818), pp. 108, 152, 154, 202, 204, 244. C.W.C.: Broadsides Collection, Honoured Sir, 25 February 1818. The first Spitalfields Act dated from 1773, 13 Geo. III, c.68. It authorised the justices of the peace of Middlesex, the Tower Hamlets and the City of London to 'settle, regulate and declare' the wages of male silk weavers in their areas. Master weavers paying more or less than the justices laid down were liable to fines, as were journeymen accepting more or less. No silk weaver within the ambit of the act was to have more than two apprentices. 32 Geo. III, c.44 extended the act to include fabrics of silk mixed with other materials, and by 51 Geo. III, c.7 journeywomen were brought under the acts. By 19 and 20 Geo. III (Ireland) it was extended by the Irish Parliament to cover the Dublin silk trade. See J.H. Clapham, 'The Spitalfields Acts, 1773-1824', Economic Journal, xxvi (1916), pp. 459 et seq.

(2) P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 214; H.C. 398 (1818) ix; Report from the Select Committee on the Silk Ribbon Weavers' Petitions, pp. 1 et seq.

In May 1819 Peter Moore presented a petition from the Corporation praying for relief from the current distress and asked for leave to introduce a bill to extend the Spitalfields Acts to Coventry. He was not encouraged. Only T. Fowell Buxton and Edward Ellice (the new member for Coventry) supported him wholeheartedly. Seven members spoke against the motion, their attitude being summed up by Robinson, the President of the Board of Trade.

> He was sure that the hon. gentleman would not be disposed to deny, that on all general principles by which such matters ought to be regulated in a commercial country like Great Britain, it was inexpedient to allow the wages of labourers, of whatever denomination, to be settled by any other means than by the natural demand for their labour.(1)

Faced with almost total opposition, Moore, 'as such was the sense of the house', withdrew his motion, 'leaving it to the responsible ministers of the Crown, to take some measures to save that city from starvation'.(2) The impression left by the debate is that Moore had been performing a ceremonial ritual to show his support for his constituents, and perhaps to educate them. The impracticability of their plan had indeed been intimated to the weavers (apparently by Ellice and Moore) but they had insisted on prosecuting it. The bitter disappointment they now felt was aggravated by a quarrel with the town clerk over his bill - an almost inevitable result of dealing with John Carter. The campaign committee had spent more than £800 without result.(3)

The frustration of the weavers' campaign and the continued refusal of the masters to pay by the list led to some industrial violence in 1818: that is, some 'donkeying' - driving unpopular masters round the city on barebacked donkeys; they were not otherwise molested. The attitude of the corporation to this disciplined and

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(1) Parliamentary Debates, xl, p. 339.

(2) Journals of the House of Commons, lxxiv (1818-1819), pp. 444 et seq. Parliamentary Debates, xl, pp. 337 et seq. Ellice did not support Moore wholeheartedly. He implied that market prices ought usually to prevail, and argued for an exception in Coventry's case because the heavy import duties on the raw material placed on the industry a burden which Moore's bill would alleviate.

(3) P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 215. The weavers' petition to the Commons in February 1818 has asked for a bill both to remedy the evil of half-pay apprenticeships and to regulate the price of labour. A mere extension of the Spitalfields Acts would not have explicitly forbidden the half-pay system, since none of the three acts contained clauses relating to the quality or nature of apprenticeship. Moore's proposed bill (which is now lost) may have contained clauses referring explicitly to the half-pay system; or Moore may have assumed that the power to regulate wages would permit magistrates effectively to end the system.

moderate coercion is suggested by the comments of the Municipal Corporation Commissioners: in which no doubt there is a core of truth, though these were written much later and the report was in general grossly partisan.

> This proceeding occupied two hours, and created infinite uproar; but no magistrate interfered to put a stop to the outrage. An alderman and the chief constable stood by and saw the procession pass; they took no notice, but went away, and had a glass of brandy and water together. Another magistrate stood at his door; he requested the rioters to desist, but took no steps to enforce compliance.(1)

Trouble returned in August 1819. There was a general strike in the ribbon trade, and more donkeying.

> Coventry at this time is in a great state of confusion; yesterday several masters rode upon donkies barebacked, for not paying a fair price. Mr. - was one; another for keeping half-pay apprentices, while so many men are out of work. Tuesday (today) it is supposed 1500 people will parade the streets with asses, in order to ride others. People went round the city this morning, to compel all the hands to strike till prices are regulated. The general parade is to continue till then.(2)

In their parade through the streets on 17 August the weavers carried a placard saying 'List Price or Nothing'. On the same day a deputation went to see the magistrates to ask for their help in bringing pressure to bear on the manufacturers. They agreed to help: but on the same day issued a warning against any more tumultous assemblies; they would be punished. At the request of the magistrates, the manufacturers' meeting was held that evening in the Castle Inn; Charles Adams, 'the acknowledged head of the trade'(3) took the chair; twenty-nine (a minority of the trade) attended. The meeting drew up the 1819 lists - repetitions, saving some slight differences, of the lists of 1816. On the following day, Wednesday 18 August, the weavers met and decided to stay out till all the masters had signed the new lists: but Peter Gregory warned them that the magistrates' warning must be obeyed. There must not be even pressure to force weavers to strike if they did not wish. 'None should go from that meeting to compel people to leave their work, as that would be deemed tumultuous; it must be a

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(1) The Report of the Municipal Commissioners on ... Coventry (Coventry, 1835), pp. 83 et seq. See also P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 216.

(2) The Times, 20 August 1819, quoting a letter from the city dated Tuesday 17 August. Cf. Bodleian Library: MSS Top. Warwickshire C.4 (MS of William Reader) f. 168: Tuesday 17 August: 'The ribbon weavers struck for an advance of wages. They paraded the streets in procession, and several of the masters, whom they deemed oppressors, were led through the streets on the back of a donkey.'

(3) P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 216.

voluntary act in all.'(1) By 26 August all the ribbon manufacturers throughout Warwickshire had signed the new lists, and the weavers returned to work. Until then, 1200 strikers' families were relieved by a distress fund for which £650 was collected by Saturday 21 August: many inhabitants subscribed, and the corporation gave £25 and the Clothers' Company £20. The distribution of money to distressed weavers was supervised in each ward by its alderman.(2)

As the dispute was drawing to a close, a public meeting at which the mayor took the chair considered the future of the list of prices; leading men of the city attended. Peter Gregory expressed the weavers' thanks for the support the corporation and city had given to their cause, and drew attention to the peaceful demeanour of the weavers. 'The handbill signed by you, Sir,' he said to the mayor - meaning by this the admonition against violence - 'was received with the utmost deference and respect ... He should not have again presumed to address so respectable a meeting, had he not been prompted by the noblest feeling of the human mind - gratitude.'(3) Charles Lilly, ribbon manufacturer and veteran leader of the dark blue party(4), praised the strike: its aims were not to raise wages, but to stabilise them at the level of the list. The success of the weavers in gaining the list would be to the advantage of the town as

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(1) The Times, 25 August 1819. See also ibid., 20 August 1819. The comments of the Postmaster reveal the attitude of the city establishment to the weavers' cause. 'This city is a loyal city as any place in the kingdom. Politics have nothing to do with the present question. The men in my opinion have been very ill-used by some of their masters. It is only a turn-out for the men not to work any longer at the reduced prices, while a number of masters are paying £10 a week more for the same work. Many thousands have gone through the streets with an ass, and have done what they call a little justice - but they were stopped with perfect ease, and have promised not to give the least offence.' P.R.O: H.O 42/192, Postmaster to Francis Freeling, quoted in A. Aspinall The Early English Trade Unions, (London, 1949), p. 321.

(2) MSS Top. Warwickshire C.4, f. 168. The Times, 25 August, 1 September 1819. See also P.P: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 216, 236 et seq - where the lists of prices are printed.

(3) The Times, 25 August 1819.

(4) Lilly's business premises were just outside the city wall on the west side of Coventry. From his eminence in that part of the city he was known as the 'King of Spon'. He was a highly popular and respected man who acted as a Coventry Solomon, settling disputes between citizens at his informal court at the Black Horse public house on the Birmingham Road. See T.W. Whitley, The Parliamentary History of the City of Coventry (Coventry, 1894), p. 251.

a whole: £1000 more, each week, could be paid to weavers - and this would be spent in the city. Now that all the manufacturers in Warwickshire had signed the list, weavers should strive to maintain it, and the town should help them to do it. 'If the prices that are now obtained are now deviated from at future times, it will be the fault of the journeyman ... He recommends that they should refrain from work, rather than take it at an inferior price.'(1) Lilly would subscribe to a second relief fund for the weavers if one should be necessary to sustain the list. Thomas Cope - another leading manufacturer - agreed with him: pointing out that one advantage of the maintenance of the list would be a diminished poor rate.(2) This second fund was opened, with Charles Lilly as its treasurer: by the end of August he had paid £472 into Troughton's bank, and a subscription in London that Edward Ellice and Charles Adams were in charge of was expected to reach £1000. 'This being the case, it is presumed no mean master or dastard weaver will ever deviate from the list prices.'(3) By April 1820 £1600 had been raised for the fund - many of the manufacturers contributing to it.(4)

This fund was used to buttress the efforts of the weavers to maintain the list. Within a few weeks of the strike a sub-committee of weavers in each of the ten wards of the city was in existence for this purpose. A central committee - the Aggregate Committee - consisting of one or two weavers from each ward was also elected by the weavers. The declared purpose of the Aggregate Committee was to bring pressure to bear upon manufacturers who offered, and weavers who accepted, lower prices than the list laid down. A meeting of the ward committees on 21 September resolved that

> as it is impossible any Weaver can maintain a family without the aid of the Parish, by wages at a less rate than the printed list sets forth, any person engaging himself to work under that price must have some motive for such conduct peculiar to himself; and as this would have the effect of bringing still further burdens on the Parish, it is but just he should directly or indirectly pay a portion of those Rates he has been the means of creating ... (therefore) the respective Committees in each ward do report to the Directors of the Poor the names of such persons who shall be found in any way to violate the last List of Prices agreed upon by the Masters, and that such reports be published in both the Coventry Newspapers.(5)

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(1) The Times, 25 August 1819.

(2) loc. cit.

(3) The Times, 1 September 1819.

(4) P.P: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 217.

(5) C.W.C: Broadsides Collection, Ribbon Trade, 22 September 1819. See also ibid., Ribbon Trade, 5 October 1819 and P.P: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 216 et seq.

The resolution shows graphically the belief in the power of publication to tame the recalcitrant in a city where the great weight of public opinion supported the list. For some years the pressure of the Aggregate Committee prevented open infractions of the list by the local masters. In this way the optimism of Lilly on 22 August was justified. What the committee could not prevent was the sort of covert departures from the list which were practised by the dishonourable masters within a few months of the August strike and which were bitterly denounced by Peter Gregory in September 1821: imposing on the journeyman all the preparatory labour which had once been performed by the undertaker, yet taking at the same time the one third commission which had been the undertaker's payment; and giving work only to journeymen who purchased looms from them at inflated prices, 'thus making the journeymen return with an enormous interest that capital which they found it necessary to sink when they commenced business'.(1)

But only one man had the temerity consistently to refuse openly to pay by the list. Farrington was not a local man, but a London manufacturer who after being prosecuted for breaking the Spitalfields Acts moved to Coventry and set up as a manufacturer of doubles and galloons. For 6dy doubles he would pay 1s., though the list price was 1s.2d. The Aggregate Committee used against him all the powers which help to explain why the local manufacturers were for some years content to abide by the list. The father of Thomas Parker, one of his weavers, received a letter from John Cave, the secretary of the Aggregate Committee: 'Understanding that 6dy doubles are made by you, below the list price, the Committee desire you to attend at the Anchor Tavern on a certain day, when they will be ready to receive any apology you may think necessary to make'.(2) The elder Parker then attended the meeting.

> Cave then asked my father if he meant to continue making those works? My father said he was not making them. Cave said they were making at his house ... Some one then called my father a foreigner, and he asked what they meant by calling him a foreigner, as he had been a freeman of Coventry forty years. They said they did not mean him, but Farrington, who had come to the town to work below prices.(3)

Parker refused to agree not to accept work at Farrington's prices.

A visit from three members of the committee then occurred, and Parker

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(1) Letter of Gregory to the Chairman of the Aggregate Committee, cited at length in P.P: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 217 et seq.

(2) Warwick and Warwickshire General Advertiser, 6 April 1822. See also P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 218.

(3) Warwick and Warwickshire General Advertiser, loc. cit.

changed his mind. This procedure was usual. Mary Smart was another of Farrington's weavers who was paid 1s. each for 6dy doubles. After she and her husband had been employed by Farrington for three months

> they ceased working for him, in consequence of the threats of the committee men who came to them. Brockhurst was one of them, and he told witness's husband ... the loom must be stopped. Witness told him that it should not, upon which he said that it should or worse would come of it. On a subsequent night, two men came, and in consequence of what passed, witness and her husband took the plaintiff's work from the loom and sent it back unfinished.(1)

In this way all Farrington's weavers were persuaded to abandon him and he found himself unable to complete his orders.(2)

But the success of the Aggregate Committee was not only due to threats. The weavers who were induced to refuse to work below the list prices were paid unemployment benefit from funds available to the Aggregate Committee. The ward committees levied one penny a week on each engine-loom and one halfpenny on each single-hand loom; 'those who refused to pay were held up to the derision of their neighbours'.(3) This money was held in trust by a 'respectable tradesman' in each ward and was used to support the Parkers, Smarts, and their like. Whenever this fund was exhausted, the Aggregate Committee was able to draw upon another - the second distress fund set up by public subscription in 1819. Thus Parker was given 3s. a week from the weavers' own fund and in addition a note from a committee man to take to Lilly, by whom he was given another 12s. a week. Smart got 18s. a week from Lilly. For some years these payments to an unknown number of weavers continued, until disaster struck. Troughton's bank went bankrupt and lost over £1,500 of the fund's money. Soon afterwards Farrington brought an action against Lilly and Cave for damages because of his loss of trade; the case was tried at Warwick assizes. Denman was counsel for the defendants. He praised the forbearance of the Coventry weavers: 'in 1819 ... whilst at Manchester there were meetings and the most disgraceful tumults - at Birmingham, a mock election, - and in every part of Yorkshire, nocturnal meetings and training - at Coventry all was silent suffering'. Lilly was 'the most respectable man in the city' and Farrington, by contrast,

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(1) loc. cit.

(2) loc. cit.

(3) Warwick and Warwickshire General Advertisers, loc. cit.

> the only individual, out of 124 masters in Coventry, who had refused to sign the list of prices agreed upon, and if he chose to be a solitary exception to an arrangement alike creditable to the rest of the masters and to the workmen, he thought he neither stood in an honourable light, nor had any reason to expect the commiseration of his fellow subjects.(1)

Mr. Justice Best thought much of this verbiage 'extremely irrelevant and irregular'.

> The man who attempted to reduce the price of labour below its proper rate, was an enemy to the whole human race, but he who gave such prices as would enable the labourer to obtain a comfortable livelihood, was the benefactor of mankind. Those who supported high prices, were not only injuring themselves, but all around them. Such conduct could only have the effect of driving labour from the country. It was like the Indian of Louisiana, who cuts down the tree to obtain the fruit ... never had he seen such conclusive evidence of a conspiracy as in the present case ... When it was found that a fund which had been raised for charitable purposes, had been applied - not to relieve real distress - ... but to support those who thought proper to throw off their masters, and to live in a state of idleness, he was afraid it would prove fatal to those who, at any future period, might require the aid of the benevolent. Its effect was to render men independent of their masters, to break the links by which society was bound together, and finally to produce consequences upon which no man could reflect without horror.

The jury returned a verdict for the plaintiff but awarded him only £50 damages.(2)

Immediately after the civil action Lilly and seven others were indicted at Coventry quarter sessions for conspiracy under the Combination Acts; the case was traversed to Warwick assizes for spring 1823. 'The treasurer being a very respectable man, other respectable persons endeavoured to effect a compromise. The whole of the fund was given up, and the poor men acknowledged their offence by a public advertisement, and the prosecutor dropped it.'(3) 'The ends of public justice', thought Sergeant Vaughan at Warwick assizes, 'would be fully answered without having recourse to further proceedings'.(4) The ends of public justice were served by an ingenious remedy; to convince everybody that the distress fund committee did not favour illegal combinations it agreed to pay the costs of the prosecution and to transfer the residue of the fund to the Coventry Street Commissioners.(5) It is impossible to be certain about the exact

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(1) Warwick and Warwickshire General Advertiser, 6 April 1822.

(2) loc. cit.

(3) P.P.: H.C. 51 (1824) v; Sixth Report from the Select Committee on Artisans and Machinery, p. 603.

(4) Warwick and Warwickshire General Advertiser, 12 April 1823.

(5) Coventry Herald, 26 May 1826.

amount transferred but one may discount completely the statement in a recent history of Coventry (and often since repeated) that £16,000 was the sum.(1) Unfortunately, the minutes of the Street Commissioners for the year in question have not survived, but their accounts record in the financial year from May 1823 to May 1824 the payment of £300 'From Charles Lilly Esq. towards the making up a new road in Broad Gate'.(2) Almost certainly this was the distress fund conscience money - which probably came from Lilly's own pocket anyway, since he had been forced owing to the fund's shortage of cash to put £500 of his own money into it.(3)

Naturally, open departures from the list of prices followed the collapse of the Aggregate Committee's financial support after the judgement of April 1822. Some masters published a new, lower list of prices, 'the bantling list', which they refused to withdraw. A general strike followed, accompanied by meetings and a silent procession through the city. The townspeople sympathised with the men, and collected another distress fund for them. And at length the formal reaffirmation by the masters of the list of 1819 was gained.(4) In fact the early 1820s were more prosperous for the city than those that had immediately preceded them. The silk industry benefited from the national economic improvement of these years. The demand for silk increased and the amount of raw silk and thrown silk imported rose from an annual average of 1,415,000 lbs between 1815 and 1817 to an average of 2,400,000 lbs between 1821 and 1823.(5) In Coventry there was between 1819 and 1824 a decline in the number of paupers(6) which, small though it was, and indicative though the totals still were of a continued amount of surplus labour and chronic poverty, produced a drop in poor expenditure

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(1) Frederick Smith, Coventry. Six Hundred Years of Municipal Life (Coventry, 2nd ed. 1946), pp. 108 et seq. Smith gives no source for his statement, but probably it was drawn from George Hall, Prize Essay, on the most advisable mode of establishing a board of conciliation ... (Coventry, 1861), p. 13, where £16,000 is given as the amount of the distress fund in April 1820. This assertion seems in turn to be based at some distance on the statement in P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 217, that the fund amounted to 'upwards of £1600' at that date - a sum far more consistent with the figures given in The Times, 1 September 1819, than is the one in Hall's fugitive piece of journalism. Prest, The Industrial Revolution in Coventry (Oxford, 1960), p. 57, follows Hall on this point.

(2) C.R.O., An Account of the Receipts and Payments by the commissioners ... within the said city and suburbs, 16th May 1823 - 16th May 1835.

(3) Coventry Herald, 19 May 1826.

(4) The Times, 9 July 1822. See also P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 218.

(5) P.P.: H.C. 678 (1831-32) xix: Report from the Select Committee on the Silk Trade, with the Minutes of Evidence, p. 10.

(6) See the tables in the appendix.

in the combined parishes from £15,757 in 1818 to £13,099 in 1822 and £12,236 in 1823, while the rate itself fell from 16s. in St. Michael's and 11s.6d. in Holy Trinity in 1818 to 9s.6d. and 6s. in 1822 and 9s.3d. and 6s. the following year, by which time the rate had dropped to the levels of 1815. The rapid fall in the rate, far greater than the concurrent fall in expenditure, is the most graphic indication of a rise in prosperity, since it reflected a far smaller need than previously to excuse payment to weavers themselves pauperised.(1)

But the modest prosperity of these years was short-lived. They were followed by a time of crisis and distress worse than that after 1815 - and largely the result of the ending of the freedom from foreign competition that the ribbon trade had for so long enjoyed.

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(1) C.R.O., Proceedings of the Guardians of the Poor, pp. 111 et seq.

III

The Elections of 1818 and 1820

The caution, moderation and quiescence of the weavers' movement of the years after 1816 was paralleled by similar qualities in the concurrent movement for radical political reform. The evidence indicates that this was often large, but almost always legal, peaceful and moderate: except at election times, when both radicals and their opponents resorted to organised violence. Elections were legitimated saturnalia that irrupted into the normally pacific texture of civic life. Radicalism was always opposed by the corporation - as Tory politically as it was paternalist towards the weavers.

In February 1816 the corporation, at Sidmouth's request, enrolled 200 special constables to control radical demonstrations in the city. They were not needed.(1) A year later, at the depth of the local distress,(2) there was a meeting of more than 4,000 in a field near Cook Street gate - probably the largest meeting ever held in the city. It resolved unanimously to petition Parliament against

> the real cause of the distress ... the intolerable load of taxes imposed upon the nation; for the prosecution of unjust and unnecessary wars; for defraying the enormous charges of an unexampled and increasing Civil List; for maintaining an unconstitutional and unprecedented Military Force in time of peace; and for supporting a numerous band of Placemen, Pensioners and Sinecurists, some of whom receive an annual income, more than sufficient to maintain all the necessitous poor of this city and country.

These evils had been greatly aggravated by the post-war deflation that had lowered prices to shopkeepers and the wages of artisans,

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(1) Bodleian Library: MSS Top. Warks C.4 (MS of William Reader), f. 167.

(2) When, in addition to the staple trade of the city, the watch industry was also much depressed: P.P: H.C. 504 (1817) vi: Report and Minutes of Evidence from the Committee on the Petitions of Watchmakers of Coventry, pp. 5 et seq.

while interest on the 'debt called national contracted by the Government' remained payable in full at the inflated rates. And they would not have arisen if Parliament had been truly representative - which meant a larger electorate, an end to rotten boroughs, and annual general elections. The meeting resolved that 'the working class of the community in this city and its environs, have borne their privations with unexampled patience; and have conformed to existing circumstances, with a degree of good sense, highly commendable'. Likewise, the meeting was conducted 'with the greatest order and the most entire unanimity'.(1) Major-General James Lyon, commander of the Midland District, found Coventry one of the least troublesome places in his charge in this year. In the spring, the 'moral rectitude of the lower classes' was shaken by a 'long uninterrupted circulation of blasphemous and seditious publications', but 'the state of the public mind' was 'tranquil'.(2) He moved two companies of foot to Birmingham from Coventry, 'less vulnerable under existing circumstances'.(3) Because of an improvement in trade, there was even less 'discontent' by the summer, though 'the germs of disaffection' still existed.(4) By the end of the year he could report that the 'numbers of the disaffected who are known to assemble sometimes are said to be insignificant and few'. Two unknown men who had visited Coventry with 'treasonable intentions' had stayed for only two days. There were in the city no Hampden Clubs or meetings for parliamentary reform. There was a dispute over wages but the people were 'generally loyal and attached to His Majesty's Government'.(5) Meanwhile, in Birmingham signatures were being collected for a petition for parliamentary reform and Lyon considered for a time transferring two more companies of foot there from Coventry.(6)

Yet the large number of radicals in the city was shown at the general election of 1818. Charles Wolseley was the first choice of the radical freemen, to stand against the city's Tory M.P., Butterworth. Wolseley withdrew. Cobbett's name was approved at

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(1) C.W.C: Broadsides Collection, At a most numerous and respectable Meeting, 28 January 1817.

(2) P.R.O: H.O. 40/6: Lyon to Sidmouth, 10 May 1817.

(3) ibid., Lyon to Sidmouth, 15 May 1817.

(4) P.R.O: H.O. 40/7, Lyon to Sidmouth, 1 August 1817.

(5) ibid., Lyon to Sidmouth, 7 December 1817.

(6) ibid., Lyon to Sidmouth, 2 December 1817.

a meeting of the London freemen chaired by Henry Hunt. A subscription was opehed to enable Cobbett to fight.(1) But Cobbett in fact did not stand. A second meeting of the Coventry freemen residing in London, with Major Cartwright in the chair, approved the candidature of T.J. Wooler, editor of the Black Dwarf, as an opponent of Butterworth. Cartwright thought that Wooler stood a better chance than Cobbett - who was in the USA and so could not fight in person. More than 200 of the London freemen, one of them reported, were willing to walk to Coventry barefoot to return him: though he would prefer a subscription for Wooler to make this agony unnecessary. An inadequate £200 was subscribed. After a few days Wooler resigned his candidacy in favour of Edward Ellice: they disagreed over political principles, but Ellice (said The Times) 'appears to be better furnished with those essential recommendations to the independent freemen of Coventry which could not be supplied by the

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(1) Bodleian Library: Gough Add. Warwickshire b.1 - b.3, 'A Chronicle of the Times, being a series of Controversial Election Papers ... collected by William Reader': b.2, newspaper cutting on 1818 election, and W. Bryant, To the Electors of Coventry, 17 June 1818. The Times, 12 June 1818. Cobbett's Weekly Political Register, 13 June 1818. Cobbett had announced his intention of standing in Coventry in ibid., 4 April 1818 and had afterwards addressed two letters to the freemen giving his views on national affairs: ibid., 18 April, 9 May 1818.

bounteous £200' given to Wooler.(1)

Ellice and Peter Moore were brought forward together by Charles Lilly, the leader of the dark blues. They, said Mark Pearman, a dark blue solicitor and election manager, were 'both safe on board the good brig Independence, commanded by Captain Lilly', while Butterworth was 'on board the old rotten brig, named Corruption, the sole property of the corporation'.(2) Moore and his dark blue supporters stressed his record as a supporter of popular rights, both local and national, and denounced Butterworth's hostility to them. Moore had been 'uniformly opposed to every Encroachment on

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(1) The Times, 18 June 1818. See also ibid., 16 June 1818. C.W.C: Broadsides Collection, To the Independent Freemen of Coventry (June 1818) - address of T.J. Wooler. Cobbett blamed Wooler for the London freemen's change of heart and attacked him even more bitterly for standing down in favour of Ellice - as a reformer 'a very moderate one at most; in short, nearly such another as Mr. Butterworth'. Cobbett's Weekly Political Register, 20 June 1818. Ellice was then thirty-seven. He was to sit for Coventry till his death in 1863, except for one break of four years. Ellice's grandfather had emigrated from Aberdeen to New York; his father, a loyalist during the American War of Independence, had moved to Montreal and became managing director of the Hudson's Bay Company and a fur trader on his own account. Edward Ellice joined his father's firm after graduating from Marischal College, Aberdeen, in 1800. Throughout his life he was closely connected with the Canadian fur trade; he became a deputy-governor of the Hudson's Bay Company. He inherited large estates in New York and at Beauharnais in Canada and spent much time on them in his early life. He often visited France, and was a close friend of Guizot, Thiers and Prosper Mérimée. Much of every summer he spent at his 'cottage' at Glenquoich, near Invergarry. In Coventry he plainly became more and more popular, but he hardly ever visited it except at election times, and not always even then. As the city's Tory newspaper remarked, 'He is more often in Paris than Coventry' (Coventry Standard, 31 March 1837). After his marriage in 1809 to the youngest daughter of the second Earl Grey, he was a prominent member of the Whig party, being a whip during the Reform Bill crisis and secretary at war after till 1834: he refused all office thereafter. He was known as the 'Bear', possibly because of his wiliness, probably because of his connection with the fur trade. Prosper Mérimée wrote that 'he was one of the most perfect examples of the gentleman, of the old type ... his skill, his tact, his deep knowledge of human nature, above all his wordly wisdom, powerfully contributed to the passage of the reform bill ... Few men have had in the same measure the ability to please at first acquaintance; to whomsoever he talked to - a peer or a labourer - he did so with a friendly and good-humoured manner that it would have been hard to resist.' Prosper Mérimée, Etudes Anglo-Américaines (Paris, 1930 ed), pp. 242 et seq. (my translation). See also D.N.B. The lack of a biography of Ellice is one of the saddest gaps in Victorian studies: it may be due in part to the near-illegibility of his handwriting.

(2) Gough Add. Warwickshire, b.2, substance of Mr. Pearman's speech, 17 June 1818 (MS). See also ibid., Coventry Freemen, 12 June 1818.

the invaluable acquired Right of Apprenticeship, to which alone the Nation is proudly indebted, for the laudable habits of unwearied Industry'.(1) Moore had fought for the select committee then considering the weavers' demand for statutory regulation of wages - Butterworth had not.(2) Moore had voted for Brougham's bill to enquire into charities, from a concern at Coventry corporation's maladministration of them. Above all, he had voted against the Corn Laws, the suspension of Habeas Corpus, the Indemnity Bill, and a large standing army, and looked forward to parliamentary reform as the essential means to remove the evils then facing the kingdom. But Butterworth - besides minor delinquencies such as laziness - was guilty of five evil actions.

> First - Because he voted for the 'SUSPENSION ACT', thereby placing the liberty of every man in the kingdom, at the arbitrary disposal of a wicked and corrupt ministry.
>
> Second - Because, notwithstanding the exposure of the BLOOD-HUNTING SPIES and INFORMERS, Castles, Oliver, and Co., and the DREADFUL IMMOLATION of their victims at Derby, he has still the effrontery to justify and commend these diabolical proceedings.
>
> Third - Because he IMPEDED THE COURSE OF JUSTICE, by voting for the INDEMNITY BILL.
>
> Fourth - Because he voted for a STANDING ARMY of 150,000 men, in time of profound peace.
>
> Fifth - Because, from a tender regard, no doubt, to the memory of Sir Thomas White, he did NOT support Mr. Brougham's Bill, for an enquiry into the state of the Charities of this kingdom.(3)

(1) C.W.C.: Broadsides Collection, To the Independent Freemen of the City of Coventry, 3 June 1818.
(2) Gough Add. Warwickshire, b.2, Peter Gregory, Facts are Stubborn Things, June 1818.
(3) C.W.C.: Broadsides Collection, Seven Reasons for Opposing Mr. Butterworth, 11 June 1818. See also Gough Add. Warwickshire, b.2, To the Worthy and Independent Freemen of the City of Coventry, 15 June 1818, which added to the above iniquities Butterworth's voting for Onslow's apprenticeship bill (and against Rose's) and his failure to oppose the Corn Laws; ibid., MS report of Moore's speech, 18 June 1818, To the Independent Freemen of the City of Coventry, 5 June 1818 - Moore's refusal to join with Butterworth because of his record, To the Worthy and Independent Freemen of the City of Coventry, 9 June 1818 - Butterworth had voted 'in support of measures that would have disgraced the legislation of the court of Algiers', To the Independent Freemen of the City of Coventry, 16 July 1818 - a pamphlet defending Moore's parliamentary record. C.W.C.: Broadsides Collection, Peter Moore, To the Independent Freemen of the City of Coventry, 12 June 1818 is another celebration of Moore's record and aspirations. 'Of that career I am more than proud; and for the opportunity which you have afforded me in displaying it, I am more than grateful. To preserve the liberty of a free country and a free people, is more glorious, in my conception, than all foreign acquisitions and conquests: and when the whole world certifies that the violent deprivation of liberty has been cotemporaneous with the voluntary contributions of the generous hearts and willing minds of the people of a whole nation, suffering unlimited privations in support of the dignity, honor, and even the splendour of the Government, under which they lived, I can claim no merit in having resisted the unwarrantable, uncalled for assault, and all the iniquitous proceedings which have been the consequence.'

Ellice, in his address, praised Moore lavishly and aligned himself with Moore's views in his panegyric of the 'principles on which our Glorious Revolution was established in 1688'.(1) In his speeches Ellice said he was opposed to a Government that had 'suspended the liberties of the people, upon grounds established by the information of spies and informers', attributed poverty to the taxation caused by unnecessary wars, criticised the Corn Laws and the suspension of Habeas Corpus, and called for parliamentary reform - though he added that he was opposed to universal suffrage and annual parliaments. He also called for an enquiry into the city's charities.(2)

Butterworth presented himself not as a pliant ministerial tool but as a truly independent member whose concern 'to protect the liberties of our Glorious Constitution'(3) had led him after due deliberation to support the Government over the suspension of Habeas Corpus and the Indemnity Bill; his vote for a large standing army had been due to a wish not to unload thousands of men onto the labour market.(4) His real independence had led him to support the recent weavers' petition and the select committee: 'in fact, his energies increased in proportion to the difficulties thrown in the way'.(5) In these efforts he was supported by the corporation of the city - the true friend of the weavers, which had given £50 to advance their petition. In opposition were Ellice and Moore, the creatures of the silk merchants and ribbon masters: had not their wealth 'been increased in consequence of the miserable pittance paid to the weavers for their labour, and have not hundreds of those weavers been driven to the Parish?'(6) The very coalition of Ellice and Moore was an attempt at abridgement of the freemen's true independence: preserve it and vote for Butterworth - especially

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(1) Gough Add. Warwickshire, b.2, To theIndependent Freemen of the City of Coventry, 12 June 1818 (address of Edward Ellice). See also ibid., Freemen 17 June 1818 and 'Amicus', To the Independent Freemen of Coventry, 17 June 1818.

(2) Gough Add. Warwickshire, b.2, newspaper cutting on 1818 election.

(3) ibid., Joseph Butterworth, To the Independent Freemen of the City of Coventry, 29 May 1818.

(4) loc. cit. C.W.C: Joseph Butterworth, To the Independent Freemen of the City of Coventry, 13 June 1818. Butterworth was evasive on the Corn Law question. See also C.R.O: Misc. Letters, Butterworth to the mayor, 26 November 1818.

(5) C.W.C: Broadsides Collection, 'A True Friend to the Weavers', To the Weavers, 15 June 1818. See also Gough Add. Warwickshire, b.2, To The Weavers, 22 June 1818.

(6) C.W.C: Broadsides Collection, loc. cit. Gough Add. Warwickshire, b.2, To the Weavers, 16 June 1818.

since Ellice and Moore were Jacobins, and 'Deists, atheists and infidels'.(1)

In the means of illicit influence at their disposal both sides were fairly equally matched - a rare occurrence at Coventry elections. The blues were ardent and well organised and had election bullies at their command. On the other hand, though they had Ellice's long purse, Moore had little money, could afford nothing like the £15,000 he claimed he had spent to defeat Stratton, and did not bribe or treat voters. The corporation, firmly backing Butterworth, had the city's charities at their disposal for election purposes, and used them, and by their power to appoint special constables (they swore in 200) and administer the actual taking of the poll could influence the election. Butterworth, too, had plenty of money and treated on a large scale at this election.(2) On the first day of the poll the corporation seems to have surrounded the hustings with special constables and prevented the blues from voting. As a result, the Tories were ahead at the end of the first day's poll - a coveted victory. There was, wrote the mayor, 'some altercation about policing'.(3) The blues replied with an attack by their bullies - one of whom, over-enthusiastically, attacked the hustings with an axe. The sheriffs riposted by adjourning the poll and, when it was resumed, spinning the proceedings out inordinately by bureaucratic fussiness when the electors polled. This was in the hope that the blues would run out of steam, or money, and give up. After the close of poll on Thursday 18 June (the second day) 'Mr. Moore got up on the table and made a protest against the parshall conduct of the sheriffs and pledged himself we should have it that night but he never did'.(4) But in fact the corporation had already realised that all the wiles, cash and counter-force at their command could not prevail against the blue sentiments

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(1) Gough Add. Warwickshire b.2, Truth on Both Sides, 22 June 1818. See also ibid., To the Independent Freemen of the City of Coventry: King and Constitution, 16 June 1818 (an attack on the criminality of the liberal candidates), Coventry Electors: Cloven Hoof Again, 16 June 1818, Sold Again, 16 June 1818, and Coalition Extraordinary, 19 June 1818 (a lament that the once loyal blues were now supporting Jacobins). See also C.W.C: Broadsides Collection, Joseph Butterworth, To the Independent Freemen of the City of Coventry, 13 June 1818, for a lengthy demonstration that the alliance of Ellice and Moore was 'perfect proof of a decided Coalition to the prejudice of your Independence'.

(2) Gough Add. Warwickshire, b.2, MS report of Ellice's speech, 18 June 1818, To the Independent Freemen of the City of Coventry, 16 July 1818, Edward Ellice, To the Independent Freemen of the City of Coventry, 26 June 1818, and newspaper cutting on 1818 election. P.P: H.C. 547 (1835) viii, p. 62.

(3) C.R.O: MS diary of John Clarke (mayor) during the 1818 election Wednesday 17 June. P.P: H.C. 547 (1835) viii, p.68. At Coventry elections, uncommitted freemen tended to be drawn to the winner of t first day's poll in anticipation of his final victory and the treati he would offer his supporters at it.

(4) C.R.O: MS diary of John Clarke.

of the majority of freemen. Butterworth could not win. The corporation wanted to give up by the evening of 18 June; Ellice and Moore got to hear. When asked about his protest Moore said 'he would give it some time and he did not think no person had no enmity to us at all'.(1) Unfortunately, the corporation could not persuade Butterworth to drop the fight. He prolonged the poll two days more, till John Carter finally got him to withdraw. Butterworth, with only 619 votes, was defeated by Ellice with 1000 and Moore with 1180. Many freemen were unpolled. The victory procession of the dark blues, with the flags and drums of all ten wards, then took place.(2)

Many fewer than the 2,000 who subscribed to Peter Moore's gold cup in the spring were involved in the burst of radical activity in Coventry in the autumn after Peterloo: though this did represent a zenith of radicalism in the city. It was led by William Greatheed Lewis, a schoolmaster from Birmingham and a close associate of the radical George Edmonds.(3) In October Lewis began

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(1) ibid., Friday 19 June.

(2) On the contest, see, in addition to Clarke's diary, Gough Add. b.2, Peter Moore, To the Independent Freemen of the City of Coventry, 16 June 1818, Coventry Election, 16 June 1818, MS report of Ellice's speeches, 17, 18 and 24 June 1818, To the Independent Freemen of the City of Coventry, 19 June 1818, MS report of Moore's speech, 24 June 1818, State of the Procession, June1818, To the Independent Freemen of the City of Coventry, 16 July 1818, newspaper cutting on 1818 election, and letter from 'a citizen' about violence (newspaper cutting). A Correct Copy of the Poll (Coventry, 1818), p. 59. For testimony to the radicalism of many freemen, and their appreciation of Peter Moore's services, see C.W.C: Broadsides Collection, The Address to ... Peter Moore, 19 March 1819 (presented on the occasion of a gift to Moore of a gold cup subscribed for by 2000 Coventrians). The address laments the 'unjust, sanguinary, and protracted war, to serve the purposes of a faction', the National Debt, the Corn Laws, the destitution that followed from these evils, and the perversion of the constitution 'to give indemnity to the perpetrators of these evils'. 'We have pride in knowing that you, our Representative, have not occasioned, have not participated in their transaction - That you, Sir, have nobly resisted the whole of them - That you have always been at the post of duty and of honour - and have not given a Vote that has cost the Country a penny, or the Widow a tear.'

(3) J.A. Langford, A Century of Birmingham Life (Birmingham, 1868) ii, p.422. Lewis played a leading part at the meeting at Newhall Hill, Birmingham, in July 1819 when Sir Charles Wolseley was elected 'legislatorial Attorney and Representative' for the city.

an unstamped radical paper - the Coventry Recorder.(1) Its first issue denounced the Manchester magistrates' actions at the St. Peter's Field meeting two months before: they were 'the worst of murderers'.(2) Lewis and his associates - the Political Protestants of Coventry, among whom was James Grant, a chemist of Broadgate - attacked the corrupt representative system and called for radical parliamentary reform. 'The taxation created and supported by the borough-mongers is the root of all the Egyptian plagues.'(3) From October onwards, Lewis and his associates organised a demonstration in Coventry to protest against the Peterloo Massacre. The mayor was asked in a requisition signed by 700 to call a public meeting in St. Mary's Hall for this purpose: as hostile to radicalism as he was sympathetic to distressed ribbon weavers, he refused. An open-air meeting was therefore planned for Cross Cheaping instead - in the heart of the shopping area. At the magistrates' request, the meeting place was altered to Greyfriars Green.(4) Peter Moore rejoiced at the prospect of a meeting to protest at the action of the Manchester justices, the 'wanton and unpardonable suspension of the Constitution' and the malignant activities of spies and informers.(5) The Weavers' Committee, whose champion Moore was, disagreed: they placed an advertisement in the Coventry papers expressing 'detestation

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(1) The complete file of this - ten weekly issues from 16 October to 17 December 1819 - survives in Gough Add. Warwickshire, b.2, The Recorder cost 4d.

(2) Coventry Recorder, 16 October 1819. See also ibid., 21 October 1819 for another attack on the Manchester magistracy.

(3) Coventry Recorder, 5 November 1819. See also ibid., 16 October, 21 October, 29 October 1819 for the articles on the need for parliamentary reform. The panegyrics of Carlile, Major Cartwright and Cobbett in ibid., 21 October, 26 November, 3 December, 10 December 1819 were directed to the same end; see also the account of Burdett's speech at the Westminster meeting, ibid., 17 December 1819. Another object of strong attack was the maladministration of Coventry charities by the Tory corporation: though Lewis's articles on this lacked hard detail, which is not surprising since at this time even the corporation did not know what was happening to the charities in its charge. ibid., 16 October, 29 October, 12 November 1819.

(4) Journals of the House of Commons, lxxv (1819-20), p. 27. Petition of W.G. Lewis.

(5) Coventry Recorder, 16 October 1819, letter of Peter Moore.

of all revolutionary principles', and deploring the meeting: the wages of weavers had lately been raised and they needed no radical reform - which indeed was likely to have a bad effect upon trade and prosperity.(1) Only 200 Coventrians turned up at the meeting - well-publicised in advance and held on 15 November, the day of so many demonstrations throughout Britain. 300 attended from nearby districts. The demonstrators were almost equalled by the special constables enrolled by the corporation - 400 in all.(2) James Grant took the chair. George Edmonds was present: Peter Moore and Edward Ellice were not, the latter refusing to attend in a curt letter. The Political Protestants carried banners inscribed 'To the immortal memory of the Reformers massacred at Manchester' and 'Major Cartwright and the Bills of Rights and Privileges'.(3) Half an hour after the proceedings began, when Lewis was about to speak, the regular constables and the specials invaded Greyfriars Green; led by Goodall, the chief constable, they came to keep the peace (which was not in fact in danger). The constables pressed towards the hustings erected for the speakers. Lewis called out to the crowd not to resist. But the pressure of extra numbers - the crowd, after all, was doubled in size by the coming of the constables - caused some panic. There seems to have been some stone-throwing: 'a variety of skirmishing took place'.(4) The regulars drew their truncheons and knocked two or three demonstrators insensible: the specials disapproved, many breaking their white staves in protest. Reaching the hustings, the regulars demolished them - forcing Lewis to leap down - and tore up the banners. The constables were called to order by the magistrates who then arrived. The meeting then resumed, resolutions against the Manchester magistrates being carried.(5)

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(1) Gough Add. Warwickshire, b.2, newspaper cutting on meeting. The advertisement is a graphic demonstration of the mutually sustaining rapport between the paternalist attitudes of the city (and the Toryism of the corporation) and the moderation of most weavers. A few weeks before the weavers had been indebted to the city establishment (and the corporation in particular) for the successful conclusion of their strike for the list of prices and the fund set up afterwards to maintain it.

(2) MSS Top. Warwickshire C.4, f.169. Gough Add. Warwickshire b.2, newspaper cutting cited.

(3) Coventry Recorder, 12 November 1819 (letter of Edward Ellice), 19 November 1819.

(4) MSS. Top. Warwickshire C.4, loc. cit.

(5) loc. cit. Gough Add. Warwickshire b.2, loc. cit. Journals of the House of Commons, loc. cit. The three accounts do not differ on essentials, though the first was written by William Reader, the Tory corporator, and the third came of course from Lewis himself.

Edmonds afterwards saw the mayor, who expressed his regrets for the constables' violence. Lewis complained bitterly about the constables, but made clear his lack of complaint against the magistrates.(1)

A few days later Cobbett passed through Coventry on his way to London, after landing at Liverpool from the United States. He denounced both Ellice and Moore for failing to attend Lewis's meeting, and announced that he would stand for Coventry at the next election.(2) In the New Year he appealed for public subscription to a fund to enable him to fight the contest, and in particular to pay the expenses of the London freemen, some of whom gave him their support.(3) Cobbett's addresses called for universal suffrage and annual parliaments and denounced the Six Acts and both Moore and Ellice for being insufficiently opposed to the repressive policies of the government.(4) Ellice's address disavowed new principles and mentioned briefly his 'firm and unshaken attachment to the constitution of the county, and to the rights and liberties of the

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(1) Coventry Recorder, 19 November 1819. Gough Add. Warwickshire, b.2, newspaper cutting on Lewis's complaint. Soon after Lewis was indicted with T.J. Wooler, Major Cartwright, Edmonds and Maddocks for seditious conspiracy in organising the Newhall Hill meeting in July. Lewis was also indicted for libelling the Manchester magistrates on this charge he was convicted in December 1820 and sentenced to two years in Oakham gaol. The other charge was dropped against him: the others were sentenced to various terms of imprisonment, apart from Cartwright, who was fined. J.A. Langford, op. cit., ii, pp. 424 et seq, 434 et seq. The Times, 2 June 1821. Lewis discontinued the Coventry Recorder in December 1819: writing that he could not afford to publish a stamped paper and would have to drop his unstamped one. ibid., 17 December 1819. His last article was an account of the Lady Godiva legend - the last refuge of the Coventry journalist. He was not afterwards active in Coventry. Lewis died in 1842. MSS Top. Warwickshire C.4, f. 168.

(2) Coventry Recorder, 3 December 1819. Cobbett's Weekly Political Register, 4 December 1819. See also ibid., 18 September 1819, for an attack on Ellice for wishing to delay the resumption of cash payments. His 'real name is, I dare say, Elias'.

(3) Cobbett's Weekly Political Register, 6 January, 22 January, 27 January, 19 February 1820. Cobbett claimed that this 'Fund for Reform' had reached £200 by the middle of February. More was doubtless collected after, but the total is certain to have been much less than the resources of Ellice and Moore. See also Gough Add. Warwickshire, b.2, Speech of the Chairman, and resolutions passed at a meeting of the freemen of Coventry ... on 15 February 1820, and newspaper cutting on the collection of £50 for the election, apparently from the London freemen.

(4) Gough Add. Warwickshire, b.2, To the Freemen and Electors of Coventry, 31 January 1820, To the Freemen of the City of Coventry, 17 February 1820, To the Freemen of Coventry, 24 February 1820, To the Freemen of the City of Coventry, 3 March 1820. See also Cobbett's Weekly Political Register, 25 March 1820, pp. 92 et seq, for abrasive comments on Moore and Ellice. This issue is in its entirety a graphic account of the election, mixed with uncommon vanity.

people'.(1) Moore's attacked twenty-five years of ruinous war and the plot of the government to reduce the 'National Spirit of Britons, to the slavish condition of silent submission to an arbitrary power'.(2) Both attacked universal suffrage in their speeches - Moore on the grounds that it would reduce the privileged value of a seven years' apprenticeship, an institution to whose praise he devoted much time. Ellice was much taken with the evil of the Corn Laws - upon which he blamed current distress. Both explicitly avowed their unity - and in particular their common hostility to Cobbett, about whom epithets such as seditious, slanderer, and calumniator were frequent in their speeches.(3) They were also opposed to the corporation: but this was also opposed to Cobbett. The mayor advised one group of London freemen that the corporation advised 'silent contempt' for him.(4) At the last minute the corporation brought forward a fourth candidate - Henry Jackson Close of Ladywood, an army officer who had served in India - with the aim (as Cobbett put it) 'of getting Moore out and keeping me out, by causing votes to be split between Close and Ellice'.(5) Close was a Tory who professed 'attachment to our invaluable constitution'.(6)

The dark blue committees prepared well for the contest. As Cobbett approached Coventry from Dunchurch, the blues marched out to meet him with banners and bands, with the intention (so Cobbett wrote) of throwing him into the river Sherbourne. They were met by a band of Cobbett's supporters, who broke up their columns and stove in the drums. Victorious, these radicals then met Cobbett 'with

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(1) Gough Add. Warwickshire, b.2, To the Worthy and Independent Freemen of the City of Coventry, 14 February 1820.

(2) ibid., Address of Mr. Peter Moore, 24 March 1820.

(3) ibid., newspaper cutting on 1820 election. See also ibid., To the worthy and independent freemen of the city of Coventry, 29 February 1820, and The bone-grubber's last shift, 2 March 1820: dark blue broadsides, the first a comparison between Joanna Southcott and Cobbett as imposters, and the second a scurrilous account of Cobbett's transport of Paine's mortal remains from the United States.

(4) ibid., To the Independent freemen of Coventry, 4 March 1820. The freemen in question were those who met at the Griffin Inn.

(5) Cobbett's Weekly Political Register, 25 March 1820, p. 98. For the Tory corporation, Ellice was preferable to Moore.

(6) Gough Add. Warwickshire, b.2, To the Worthy and Independent Freemen of the City of Coventry, 7 March 1820, To the Worthy and Independent Freemen of the City of Coventry, 9 March 1820.

leaves of laurel in their hats and boughs in their hands'.(1) This was the last time that Cobbett's men had things their way in the streets. The blues had plenty of money - certainly far more than Cobbett could command: Ellice had a long purse, and even the normally indigent Peter Moore had some - much to Ellice's relief.(2) The ribbon manufacturers who were Ellice's chief supporters - Cobbett's 'Rich Ruffians of Coventry' - also subscribed handsomely, and threatened with a stoppage of work those weavers who voted for Cobbett. The money was spent in hiring bands of election bullies in the city and the villages about, arming them with pen-knives and plying them with drink.(3) Despite these endeavours, Cobbett came at the head of the poll on the first day - Wednesday 8 June.(4) Much of his support seems to have come from ribbon weavers who rejected the moderate radicalism of Moore and Ellice - especially since most of the ribbon manufacturers were backing them.(5) Significantly, Cobbett's leading supporters in the city, apart from James Grant the Broadgate chemist, were the two ribbon manufacturers - John Sargeant and John Robinson - who had set themselves apart from the bulk of their fellows in 1816 by calling for an act of parliament to enforce the list of prices.(6) The hostility of the Cobbettite weavers for their masters (not removed by the concurrent Aggregate Committee) joined hands with another tradition - that of the Tory paternalism long espoused by the corporation and represented by Close: of the first 97 votes given to Close 48 were also given to Cobbett. The corporation's plan that votes for their candidate

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(1) Cobbett's Weekly Political Register, 25 March 1820, pp. 87 et seq.

(2) National Library of Scotland: Ellice Papers, E60/25, Edward Ellice to Lady Hannah Ellice, 10 March 1820.

(3) Cobbett's Weekly Political Register, 25 March 1820, pp. 92, 96 et seq, 116 et seq.

(4) ibid., p. 92. P.P: H.C. 547 (1835) viii, p. 68.

(5) Cobbett was especially disgusted by the fact that some of his chief opponents among the rich ruffians had subscribed towards the expenses of Lewis's meeting, but could not carry their call for parliamentary reform so far as to support him. Cobbett's Weekly Political Register, 25 March 1820, p. 95.

(6) ibid., pp. 90, 101. Cobbett's committee met at Grant's house. See also Gough Add. Warwickshire, b.2, Peter Gregory, To the Independent Freemen of the City of Coventry, 8 March 1820. Gregory, as a weavers' leader, had worked with Sargeant and Robinson for the bill, but now, as a dark blue, backed Moore and Ellice.

would be split with Ellice had gone awry; only 3 such splits occurred.(1) Cobbett now saw a chance for Close and him to succeed, by combining the Tory corporation and Cobbettite interests; he put the plan to Close, and to the corporation. Only one corporator, Alderman Merridew, was in favour. The others were unwilling to gain success for Close at the price of Cobbett's victory too: they disliked Cobbett more than Ellice and Moore. Through John Carter, they told Close that they could not agree to Cobbett's plan. Indeed, they were anxious to prevent Cobbett from gaining strength from the second votes of Tories who knew that he, too, was hostile to the ribbon masters' candidate. So they induced Close to resign on Friday 10 March, paying his expenses as a sweetener.(2)

Meanwhile, the dark blues wished to overturn Cobbett's victory on the first day's poll by bringing up election bullies in greater strength than before, from the country, liberally providing them with drink, and stationing them round the booth to prevent Cobbett's men from voting. Electors were beaten, and their clothes ripped up; Cobbett found himself in the middle of a dark blue mob and had to fight hard, using his snuff-box as a knuckle-duster. Cobbett sent six written notices to the sheriffs on 9 and 10 March, alleging his life was in danger; a group of special constables was appointed to escort him. The Cobbettites collected a band of 300 or 400 men round the booth on the morning of 10 March and polled well, until

> the Rich Ruffians (several of them in person) came with their savages, not less than 500 in number, in regular order, about eight or ten deep, with drums and banners at their head ... The head of this column of savages began the attack upon my voters at the upper end of the Booth. Fighting was out of the question. All attempts to resist were in vain. And, in five minutes, three hundred of my voters were so completely driven away as if an army had made an attack upon them.(3)

The Cobbett voters were driven to Bishop Street, taken prisoner there and brought back to the Craven Arms while the blue band played 'See the Conquering Hero Comes'.(4)

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(1) Ellice Papers, E60/26, Edward Ellice to Lady Hannah Ellice, 9 March 1820.

(2) P.P: H.C. 148 (1826-27) iv, pp. 215, 221. The Report of the Municipal Commissioners on ... Coventry, p. 86. Gough Add. Warwickshire b.2, To the Independent Freemen of the City of Coventry, 10 March 1820 - Close's farewell. Cobbett's Weekly Political Register, 25 March 1820, p. 99. Cobbett added that Close was a 'very good and frank man'. 149 men voted for Close before he retired, of whom 90 also voted for Cobbett: A Correct Copy of the Poll for the City of Coventry (Coventry, 1820).

(3) Cobbett's Weekly Political Register, 25 March 1820, pp. 106 et seq. See also ibid., pp. 101 et seq, and Ellice Papers, E60/25.

(4) Gough Add. Warwickshire, b.2, newspaper cutting on election.

For the two remaining days of the poll Cobbett's voters could not approach the booth in safety. John Careless, a ribbon weaver, swore an affidavit that as he got into the booth on Saturday the blue bullies called out for

> a show of hands for Ellice and Moore, and upon that show of hands, all that did not show their hands, were attacked and pulled from the booth - that while he was hanging on to the booth in order to poll, John Roe forced his knees between his thighs and tried to injure him - that while he was polling, his coat was ripped up to the collar, and he felt something sharp prick him in the small of his back ... during the whole of the present election, he has seen a body of men, who moved from one part of the booth to another, wherever they saw the friends of Mr. Cobbett placed to poll, and by pushing and other violent means, force them from their situation.(1)

Cobbett complained to the mayor and the sheriffs and asked for constables to protect his voters: this was not given, but Cobbett himself wrote that it could not in any case have been adequate.(2) So anxious were the dark blues to show their dislike of extreme radicalism, and so annoyed by Cobbett's refusal to give up the poll,,that on Saturday evening a crowd attacked Sargeant's house, broke the windows, forced their way in and were driven off by Cobbett with a sword and friends with pokers. Quiet was restored by the prompt arrival of the constables.(3) Ellice was annoyed by Cobbett's refusal to give up the poll, but thought that blue violence was now getting out of hand.

> He threatens to carry us until the last man has been polled ... and I am afraid, for I wish no personal violence, that this devil if he persists, will never get alive out of the city. You have no idea of the exasperated feelings which prevail against him and he cannot stir a step without the protection of the police officers.(4)

The expense was getting out of hand too: on Monday 13 March Ellice and Moore stopped it.(5) By then Ellice had 1483 votes, Moore 1433

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(1) Cobbett's Weekly Political Register, 25 March 1820, pp. 135 et seq. See also ibid., pp. 107 et seq, 117 et seq, 133 et seq. One of the bullies there mentioned was 'Bulldog' Harris, later employed by the Tories at the election of 1826.

(2) ibid., pp. 119, 125, 130 et seq.

(3) ibid., pp. 113 et seq. Cf. Ellice Papers: E60/27, Edward Ellice to Lady Hannah Ellice, 12 March 1820: 'the mob made a great attack upon the house in which Cobbett lives, and which they almost demolished'. Ellice had also written (ibid., E60/25) that 'a donkey with tar and feathers they tell me are in preparation'. These were not used. This is apparently the only reference to donkeying in a political contest in Coventry.

(4) Ellice Papers, E60/27. Ellice's defence to the charge of violence was the usual one at Coventry elections - that the other side had started it. He was especially annoyed by Cobbett's allegation that he had personally instigated the attack on Sargeant's house. ibid., E60/30, Edward Ellice to Lady Hannah Ellice, 13 March 1820. See also Gough Add. Warwickshire b.2, newspaper cutting on election.

(5) Ellice Papers, E60/30.

and Cobbett 520;(1) the violence and the consequent departure from Coventry of many of the out-electors pledged to Cobbett made his victory impossible, and he resigned. That he had gained so many votes under such circumstances is proof of the strength of radicalism in the city. 'The 517 votes, given for me, were real votes. They were given in consequence of a conviction, that to elect me would be a good done for the country.'(2)

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(1) A Correct Copy of the Poll ... p. 64.

(2) Cobbett's Weekly Political Register, 25 March 1820, pp. 126, 128. After the election Ellice and Moore issued thanks for their victory over 'imposture, falsehood, and slander'. Gough Add. Warwickshire, b.2, To the worthy and independent freemen of the City of Coventry, 16 March 1820. See also Ellice Papers E17/6, Earl Grey to Edward Ellice, 20 March 1820, commiserating with him on the 'atrocious libels' that Cobbett had expressed about him and recommending legal action. The libels were the frequent assertions by Cobbett that Ellice had personally directed the violence.

IV

The end of Prohibition and the Election of 1826

In the early 1820s the silk manufacturers of Britain had been for many years protected from foreign competition. In the 1760s the pressure from silk manufacturers was part of what has recently been described as a new and 'powerful wave of deliberate and conscious protectionism'.(1) It gained in 1765 the prohibition of the import of some foreign manufactured silk goods and in the following year this prohibition was extended, for five years, to all such goods. The prohibition was afterwards renewed for further periods and eventually made perpetual in 1809. Thus the silk industry of Britain became, with linen, 'fairly clear examples of infant industries reared to maturity under protection'.(2) At the same time the duty on imported undyed thrown silk rose from 9½d. a lb in 1660 to 7s.4d. in 1784, in ten stages, and then by a further four stages to 14s.7d. in 1814. By that year the duty on dyed thrown silk was £2.5s.6d. a lb. The duties on raw silk had risen in the same way; in 1817 Italian and Chinese raw silk bore a duty of 5s.6d. a lb and Bengal one of 3s.6d. These duties raised the cost of manufacture considerably, equalling, indeed, between one quarter and one third of the prime cost of the raw material, of which, to aggravate matters, a fourth was wasted during the process of manufacture.(3)

By about 1820 the silk duties provided between £500,000 and £600,000 annually to the Exchequer. Naturally, there were complaints throughout the industry at this burden. There were, however, significantly different degrees of hostility. At one extreme were

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(1) Ralph Davis, 'The Rise of Protectionism', Economic History Review, 2nd series, xix (1966), p. 314.

(2) ibid., p. 316. See also P.P: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 4.

(3) P.P.: H.C. 703 (1821) vii, p. 5; H.C. 678 (1831-32) xix, pp. 265 et seq; [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 7.

the spokesmen for the Coventry silk-ribbon industry, like John Carter and John Robinson, whose lament that the duties impeded exports was somewhat perfunctory. The Coventry trade was always more eager to retain a comfortable monopoly of the home trade than to compete in foreign markets. And Carter and Robinson were leaders of the solid body of opinion in Coventry which supported the extension of the Spitalfields Acts and was thus willing to accept an increase in labour costs which would have impeded exports even more. At the other extreme were men like Stephen Wilson, a Spitalfields manufacturer, who was anxious to increase both exports and consumption at home by cutting costs; he believed that Britain's exports of silk goods were far too low because very high duties and the effects of the Spitalfields Acts raised costs and helped to make manufactured silks, weight for weight, more expensive than silver. A drawback of 12s. a lb on silk stuffs and 10s. on ribbons was paid to exporters to compensate for the import duties but the bureaucratic procedures and legal expenses that were involved in obtaining it made it often not worthwhile. Wilson believed that the high cost of British manufactured silks encouraged smuggling and thus worked directly to the disadvantage even of those manufacturers content to confine themselves to the home market. Wilson was 'entirely of ... the opinion that the high duties are the cause of low consumption at home, less exportation abroad, and a retrenchment of the labour of our own people'.(1) Wilson did not of course argue openly that the prohibition on the import of foreign manufactured silks should also be lifted. But there was never any chance that the industry could have things both ways. A powerful stimulus to change came from the report of a Lords committee in 1821; after rehearsing the evils caused by the import duties it concluded that if they were reduced the native industry should be able to compete with French imports, even if they were admitted with tariffs as low as 12% or 15%.(2)

Thus silk was one of themain articles to be affected by the changes announced in the 'first free trade budget' of February 1824. Robinson, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, argued that other nations

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(1) P.P.: H.C. 134 (1818) ix, pp. 6, 37; H.C.211 and 278 (1818) ix, pp. 176 et seq; H.C. 703 (1821) vii, pp. 5, 39 et seq.

(2) P.P.: H.C. 703 (1821) vii, p. 6.

would say unless prohibition were ended 'that the whole end we had in view was to cajole them into the admission of our own manufactures into their territories, while we continued, by adhering closely to an antiquated system, to exclude their manufactures from our territories'. The need to induce foreigners to cut tariffs on our goods forced Britain to offer reciprocity. 'It is time to cut the cords which tie down commerce to the earth, that she may spring aloft, unconfined and unrestricted, and shower her blessings on every part of the world.' The prohibitory laws were to be repealed, and instead there was to be a protective tariff on manufactured silks, amounting to 30% ad valorem. There were also to be sweeping reductions in the import duties on the raw materials from 5 July 1824 - on Bengal raw silk to 3d. a lb, on Chinese and Italian raw silk to 6d. a lb, and on thrown silk to 7s.6d.(1)

Robinson argued that the proposed changes could safely take place at that time because the industry was prosperous. The Warwickshire weavers did not think so. Some masters were again reducing prices early in 1824, yet were being pressed by the Coventry magistrates to raise them because of the rising cost of food. There was dismay in the city at the early prospect of French competition, which the trade felt sure it could not meet. The weavers of the city met in the County Hall, and after being addressed by Peter Gregory and Thomas Newsome, resolved on a petition to Parliament, against repeal of the prohibitory laws until there was parity with France 'in point of facility of procuring the common necessaries of life'. There were four similar petitions from the weavers of Nuneaton, Bedworth, Chilvers Coton and Bulkington. Some manufacturers of the city also petitioned against repeal. These Warwickshire petitions were accompanied by many others from the British silk industry elsewhere. The inhabitants of the city met too to protest against the repeal; the widespread support for the prohibitory laws in the city was reflected in the diversity of the speakers - Charles Lilly, James Beck, the Allesley Hall banker, William Wilmot, solicitor of Hay Lane, and Alderman Whitwell, surgeon; the first two were liberals and the last two Tories.(2)

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(1) Parliamentary Debates, new series, x, pp. 304 et seq.

(2) Coventry Herald, 20 February, 5 March, 12 March 1824. Parliamentary Debates, new series, x, p. 719. Journals of the House of Commons, lxxix, (1824), pp. 92 et seq. P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 218. W. West, History, Topography and Directory of Warwickshire (Birmingham, 1830), pp. 765 et seq.

Peter Moore and Edward Ellice argued with others in the Commons for the retention of prohibition. The government refused, Huskisson denouncing the inefficiency of the industry, which repeal would energise:

> We have witnessed that chilling and benumbing effect, which is sure to be produced when no genius is called into action, and when we are rendered indifferent to exertion by the indolent security of a prohibitive system.(1)

He did, however, grant some concessions to the industry. The most important was that to allow it time to become competitive the prohibitory laws were to have another two years of life, until 5 July 1826. In addition, because of the argument that a delay of several months before the import duties on imported raw and thrown silk were reduced would cause stagnation of trade while consumers waited for the price to drop, the date for the reduction would be brought forward from 5 July to 25 March. (Huskisson was speaking on 8 March.) Merchants with raw silk on hand were to be permitted to warehouse it until 25 March and then have the difference between the old and new duties remitted. Silk goods intended for export could also be warehoused and the full drawback could be claimed on them when they were exported. Ellice asked that manufacturers who had a large stock of goods on hand for the home market should also enjoy a drawback in respect of the higher duties, and Huskisson conceded that half the drawback should be paid for such goods, provided that they were bonded, like the silks for export, by 5 April 1824, and taken out for home consumption within thirty days.(2)

In Coventry, the alarm at first felt at Robinson's proposals was much lessened when the concessions were announced. In the Commons, Ellice withdrew his opposition to repeal and repudiated on behalf of the Coventry ribbon manufacturers a compromise that had been suggested by Alexander Baring - that the trade should forgo the drawbacks in return for a further extension of prohibition.(3) The Coventry ribbon manufacturers rushed to take advantage of the drawback, which offered an easy profit; the boom was the greatest since the big purl time. The grammar school in Hales Street was taken over during the Easter school holidays as a bonding warehouse

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(1) Parliamentary Debates, new series, x, pp. 719 et seq, 800 et seq.

(2) ibid., x, pp. 812 et seq.

(3) Parliamentary Debates, new series, x, pp. 869 et seq, 1328. The bill passed through both houses easily and received the royal assent on 12 April: 5 Geo. IV, c. 21. Parliamentary Debates, new series, x, pp. 1221 et seq, 1285 et seq, 1322 et seq. Journals of the House of Commons, lxxix (1824), pp. 213 et seq.

for unmanufactured silk intended for drawback; it was soon full, its contents guarded day and night by special constables. St. Mary's Hall was used as a bonding place for ribbons; it was to open at 9.0 a.m. on Monday 29 March but by midnight on Sunday a queue for admission was forming and by 6.0 a.m. on Monday the line of carts stretched up Bailey Lane to the County Hall; weavers had been busy for days making ribbons to catch the drawback.(1)

The boom lasted longer than the drawback concession. The fall in the price of raw and thrown silk after the duties were lowered led to a drop in the price of ribbons and thus augmented demand. By September the trade was flourishing more than anybody could remember and the demand could not be met; the cost of raw silk was rising. But there were hints that the boom was precarious; there were violent fluctuations in the demand for and price of silk and ribbons.(2) By the autumn of 1825 fears of the effects of French competition when the ports were opened the following summer were being uttered and some ribbon manufacturers sent a memorial to the Board of Trade asking for an extension of time before foreign ribbons were admitted; the request was refused. The weavers who attended the meeting for them in the County Hall heard Peter Gregory call for a total repeal of the Corn Laws, a reduction of house rents, and the 'exemption of every operative from national and local taxation' before the prohibitory laws were lifted: unless these impediments to cost-efficiency were removed French competition would have fatal consequences. A petition to the House of Commons embodying these sentiments was agreed on.(3) Early in 1826 the boom was over; the general slump of 1825 was aggravated in Coventry by dismal apprehensions at the imminent lifting of the prohibitory laws, and by a refusal to manufacture ribbons when a flood of French ribbons was expected. Weavers and masters, quarrelling bitterly over wages, united in pressing for a continuance of prohibition in further memorials to the Board of Trade; Ellice told them that he had pressed for a postponement, without success.(4)

In February the ribbon weavers and manufacturers of Coventry and north Warwickshire and the inhabitants of the city submitted seven petitions to the Commons for the repeal of the 1824 act and

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(1) Coventry Herald, 12 March, 26 March, 2 April 1824.

(2) ibid., 24 September 1824, 15 April, 15 July 1825. P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 9.

(3) Coventry Herald, 7 October, 18 November, 25 November 1825.

(4) ibid., 20 January, 3 February, 17 February, 28 April 1826.

the continuance of prohibition; there were many from other silk towns to the same effect.(1) In February Ellice moved that the petitions should be referred to a select committee, arguing that the Warwickshire industry needed more time to make its machinery equal in efficiency to the French. Peter Moore supported him, but Charles Grant of Inverness-shire put his finger on the crucial point.

> Why should we not derive the same advantage from machinery in the silk trade that we did in other trades? Why was it that we did not do so? - because our prohibitory system had prevented the average application of industry and talent. The trade wanted that incitement, and was ruined for want of it, but that incitement the new measures would give. He admitted that the looms of Coventry were inferior to the French, and he was ashamed that he was compelled to admit it, but put them once into competition, and that inequality would speedily be at an end.(2)

Ellice's motion was lost by 40 votes to 222.(3)

Thus on 5 July 1826 the prohibitory laws lapsed and were succeeded by protective tariffs. The act of 1824(4) had established these at 30% ad valorem; the same act had reduced the duties on raw silk to a nominal 3d. lb and on thrown to 7s.6d. lb. By an act of 1826(5) the duties on thrown silk were altered to a scale ranging from 2s. lb on undyed singles to 6s.8d. lb on dyed organzine: the effect of these reductions would of course be to make competition with the continent easier for British weavers but harder for British throwsters. More significant for the British weaver was the concurrent alteration in the nature of the tariff, from a calculation ad valorem to one by weight. This was done, James Deacon Hume afterwards said, at the request of the trade; ad valorem duties tempted the importer to place low values on his goods. The tariff on ribbons thus varied from 15s. lb on plain to £1.7s.6d. on figured velvet ribbons but was intended to give a 30% protection - the amount supposed by the Board of Trade to be the maximum compatible with the need to make smuggling unprofitable.(6)

The ending of prohibition was awaited with melancholy foreboding in the city - but for some years after July 1826 the ruinous French competition which had been expected did not occur. It took some

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(1) Journals of the House of Commons, lxxxi (1826), pp. 12 et seq.

(2) Parliamentary Debates, new series, xiv, pp. 831 et seq. See also pp. 733 et seq, 763 et seq, 809 et seq, 848 et seq.

(3) ibid, p. 859.

(4) 5 Geo.IV, c. 21.
(5) 7 Geo.IV, c. 53.
(6) P.P.: H.C. 678 (1831-32) xix, pp. 6, 19; [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p.6. There is no record in the Parliamentary Debates of the passage of 7 Geo. IV, c. 53 or of the reasons for it.

years for French suppliers to seek out channels of trade in Britain, and to accustom themselves to making ribbons in the usual British lengths of thirty-six yards. 1827 and 1828 were good years for the ribbon industry; French competition did not hit the trade seriously until 1829. By the autumn of 1827 the ribbon masters had come to think that their alarm had been unnecessary and that Huskisson's measures had been to their advantage.(1)

Thus for the ribbon masters the first free trade budget had initiated a period of prosperity, broken by the slump of 1825 and 1826. This was not, however, the fate of the weavers. For them the years from 1824 onwards were a period of almost unrelieved gloom; in good times and bad their earnings declined steadily. In February 1824 the modest prosperity that the weavers had enjoyed in the early 1820s was ending; earnings were again cut and there were open infractions of the list. In the boom that followed in the spring Huskisson's concessions of March 1824 the masters refused at first to raise prices and the weavers could once again only lament their impotence. But by September, when the boom was at its height, the weavers succeeded in gaining the masters' signatures to another list, which in the case of the engine-loom was some 5% or 6% lower than the list of 1819. Very soon even this list was generally abandoned.(2)

There was talk in the summer of 1825 of reducing earnings even further, and by April 1826 earnings were 30% below what they had been two and a half years before. At the beginning of May the weavers asked the masters to meet a deputation with a view to discussing a new list. The masters refused; such a meeting, they said, would be quite useless. Therefore a meeting of weavers held on Stivichall Green, near the toll gate on the Kenilworth Road, decided to recommend weavers to see masters separately. At length the masters agreed to a new list of prices, which was published on 10 May. It laid down scales that were slightly higher than those that had recently been paid, but which nonetheless were lower than those of the 1824 list and far lower than those of the 1819 list, giving the engine-loom weaver in full employ about one quarter less per week than by the list of 1819. It thus did very little more

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(1) Coventry Herald, 30 June 1826, 28 September 1827. P.P.: H.C. 678 (1831-32) xix, pp. 27, 34, 66; [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 9.

(2) P.P.: H.C. 678 (1831-32) xix, pp. 53 et seq; [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 218 et seq. Coventry Herald, 20 February, 12 March, 9 April, 16 April, 23 July, 24 September 1824. C.W.C.: Broadsides Collection, To the Worthy Citizens and Inhabitants of Coventry (1824).

than register and formalise the fall in earnings which had taken place; the masters were not now even pretending to maintain the old rate of earnings.(1)

The weavers could do nothing, in either the short term or the long. During the agitation of May 1826 the journeyhands, both men and women, formed the City of Coventry Weavers' Provident Union for Trade and Burial - part trade union, part friendly society with the payment of supplements to low earnings as one of its objects. No more is heard of it, and there is no evidence that either of its functions was fulfilled. At the time it was formed production had stopped as a result of fears of the forthcoming imports of continental ribbons. This led to unemployment so general as to make weavers grateful for work at any price, and to distress so dreadful that any friendly society seeking to alleviate it with the weavers' own contributions would soon have been ruined. By the middle of May 770 looms and 1130 weavers in the city were idle. A relief fund was organised at a public meeting in the County Hall. The Mayor, James Weare, was supported in his plea for subscriptions by two men who were soon to support the Tory Corporation in the election of June 1826 - Mark Pearman and Alderman Whitwell - and by two liberals who were to oppose it - Peter Gregory and Charles Lilly. At this meeting Gregory said that he had visited a weaver called Coulson in Much Park Street, and had seen children without clothes, on beds without sheets or blankets, living on handfuls of horse-beans (which they described as a luxury) given to them by a kindly ostler.(2) Their masters could offer as an excuse for their failure to pay no more than the 1826 list of prices the slump then prevailing. But over a year later, when the ruinous competition from France had not materialised and the masters were doing well, they still refused to pay by more than the 1826 list and even this was, it seems, being infringed.(3)

Unable to improve their earnings, many weavers displaced their impotent rage at their masters onto Edward Ellice at the general election of 1826. He was the candidate supported by many leading ribbon manufacturers and silkmen; and in particular by Thomas Cope, the largest master and then very unpopular because of his intransigence

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(1) Coventry Herald, 25 August 1825, 21 April, 28 April, 5 May 1826. P.P.: H.C. 678 (1831-32) xix, p. 54; [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 219, 236 et seq.

(2) Coventry Herald, 5 May, 19 May 1826. P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 199.

(3) Coventry Herald, 26 October 1827. P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 219.

over earnings. In addition, they were enraged by words alleged to have been uttered by Ellice in 1824 to the Coventry manufacturers when the 'free trade' measures were settled: 'Now, Gentlemen, you may return to Coventry, and by reducing the price of weaving, you may compete with France and all the world'.(1) Ellice had certainly welcomed the 'free trade' measures, in their final form, from which manufacturers had profited and weavers had not. No such welcome had been given by Peter Moore, and though some weavers felt that he was now too old, he was, with his long tradition of supporting popular rights (which included his recent work for the repeal of the Combination Laws), more liked than Ellice.(2) In the autumn of 1825 Mark Pearman, the Coventry solicitor, who had acted for the dark blue interest at all elections since 1790, was approached by two of the ten dark blue ward managers who told him of the weavers' determination not to return Ellice again. Pearman had his own reasons for disliking both Ellice and Moore. After the 1820 election he had had to threaten legal action against Moore to get the balance of his election expenses from him, and more importantly, he had changed his mind over Catholic Emancipation, which Ellice and Moore had supported for years. The weavers did not share these feelings, and in declaring against Ellice and Moore and in favour of two 'Protestant' candidates Pearman, though he claimed to be acting for the dark blue freemen, was not.(3)

The corporation began to use its powerful electoral influence against Ellice and Moore in the spring of 1826. The corporators were High Tories - opposed to Catholic Emancipation: most of them were Anglicans supporting the Establishment, in which the dissenting minority - 'high churchmen except that they do not go to church' -

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(1) C.W.C.: Broadsides Collection, To the Weavers and Freemen of the City of Coventry, 1826. These words seem to refer to the welcome given by Ellice in March 1824 to Huskisson's important concession over the drawback on imported silk, which gave a great bonus to masters: 'the leading men in the trade had received an explanation from the Treasury that morning, which gave them the most complete satisfaction. Those of Coventry had already left town with the determination of putting all their people in immediate active employment.' Parliamentary Debates, new series, x, p. 869.

(2) The Times, 14 June 1826. Coventry Herald, 28 September 1827. P.P: H.C. 148 (1826-27) iv: Report from the Select Committee on the Coventry Election, pp. 30, 71. Many Coventry freemen resident in London, however, disliked Peter Moore: see P.P: H.C. 148 (1826-27) iv, p. 259. 'An Enemy to All Kinds of Humbug' wrote to John Carter from London, 13 June 1826, about Moore: 'if he was as well known in Coventry as he is in the City of London, he would be drummed out of the town. He has been at the head of most of the swindling companies during the last eighteen months and there is at this moment many a virtuous family pining in want and misery in consequence.' See C.R.O: Doggett Collection, letters of John Carter.

(3) Coventry Herald, 7 October 1825. P.P: H.C. 148 (1826-27) iv, pp. 259 et seq.

agreed with them.(1) They also had a long tradition of supporting the weavers' cause against the masters; significantly, of the leading members of the corporation only one was in the silk trade, though other members of their families were certainly ribbon men.(2) Support for the weavers would have inclined the corporation to prefer Moore to Ellice: but if anything it preferred Ellice to Moore, since they had for the latter an inveterate enmity because he had been the champion of the independent freemen for so many years.(3) For the time being the corporation opposed both. Pearman was dispatched to get candidates. He saw Butterworth in retirement at Dover, and 'a gentleman who lived near London'; both refused. Early in June he obtained the services of Thomas Bilcliffe Fyler of Teddington and Richard Edensor Heathcote of Longton Hall, Staffordshire. Fyler was untried politically but Heathcote had previously stood for Newcastle.(4) John Carter, the town clerk, acted as agent for Fyler and Heathcote; he was assisted by another High Tory, Charles Woodcock, of the firm of Woodcock and Twist.

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(1) P.P: H.C. 148 (1826-27) iv, pp. 215 et seq. See also The Times, 14 June 1826.

(2) He was Alderman John Clark, a silkman. Of the other aldermen Weare was a seedsman, Samuel Whitwell a surgeon, Samuel Vale a watchmaker and the postmaster, Sir Skears Rew a retired plumber, William Whittem a retail liquor merchant, William Carter a retired innkeeper, and Henry Merridew a bookseller. The last was the father of the proprietor of the Coventry Herald. Several other members of the Merridew family were in the ribbon trade. P.P: H.C. 148 (1826-27) iv, p. 6. Coventry Observer, 27 December 1827. His father's close involvement in the 1826 election gave a problem to the proprietor of the Herald. In 1824 and 1825 it was a reforming newspaper. But on 2 June the Herald declared its neutrality in the forthcoming election, claiming that it had nothing to do with local politics, nor wished to have, since they were so unprincipled and degraded: 'We carefully stand aloof'. The paper offered few opinions during the election but was neutral on the Tory side. On 7 July it apologised for a paragraph in its issue of 16 June (which does not survive) in which Fyler and Heathcote were praised. The offending words, it claimed, had been brought to the paper just as it was going to press. They had been written by a person unconnected with the Herald and were inserted inadvertently. The paper was still a 'real friend to civil and religious liberty'. The Herald returned to the liberal fold immediately after the election.

(3) The Times, 14 June 1826.

(4) ibid., 2 June 1826. P.P: H.C. 148 (1826-27) iv, pp. 259 et seq. T.W. Whitley, op. cit., p. 277.

They set to work to recruit voters. Agents were sent through the densely built streets and courts of the town to excite hostility among the weavers against their masters and their candidates. Before and during the election a volume of broadsides large even by the standards set by a Coventry election deluged the constituency attacking Ellice's alleged words over wages (and another alleged criticism by him of weavers, that '10s. was enough for any man to get, and that if they got any more they spent it in gin shops'(1)) and the iniquity of Catholic Emancipation and the ribbon manufacturers. The addresses of Fyler and Heathcote stressed their friendship for the Established Church and the downtrodden weavers.(2)

'I told Mr. Heathcote before he stood', said Charles Woodcock later, 'that I thought he would have the corporation influence. It arises from their power, from their being the administrators of justice, from their superintending gaols, and having good places to give, and from their being the dispensers of charities.'(3) The corporation recruited Tory voters by paying the admission duty of £1.3s.6d. of aspirant freemen. In the three weeks before the election 200 freemen were enrolled - as many as in 1828 and 1829 together; many were doubtless men who having served seven-year

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(1) P.P: H.C. 148 (1826-27) iv, p. 29. The words quoted were a distortion of Ellice's criticism of the effects of gin on the morals of manufacturing towns: see The Times, 4 April 1822.

(2) P.P: H.C. 148 (1826-27) iv, p. 14. C.W.C: Pamphlets Collection, 'An Observer', Historical Sketches of the Coventry Election in June 1826 (Coventry 1826), pp. 14 et seq; Broadsides Collection, 'A Freeman who Spurns Oppression', Weavers ! Beware !! (June 1826), 'A Weaver', To the Weavers, Freemen of the City of Coventry (5 June 1826) - which advised: 'Weavers ! We do not want a Member of Parliament to consult our Masters' interest, but one who will condescend to make himself acquainted with ours.' Bodleian Library: Gough Add. Warwickshire, b.2, 'Adviser', To the Independent Freemen of the City of Coventry (7 June 1826), 'A Freeman', To the Worthy and Independent Freemen of the City of Coventry (8 June 1826), 'A Freeman', Weavers ! Be Free ! (11 June 1826), 'An Old Freeman', Brother Weavers, Freemen, (11 June 1826) - which argued, 'We want men of feeling hearts, and if I mistake not, we have found them in the Champions of our Cause, Fyler and Heathcote', 'A Weaver', Weavers of Coventry (13 June 1826), 'A Freeman', To the Freemen of Coventry (13 June 1826) and Catechism (14 June 1826): 'Who forced the Coventry Protestants to carry faggots on their shoulders, in Cross Cheaping, in 1485 and 1510? - The Papists. Who have always supported the Popish Claims? - Moore and Ellice.' The addresses of Fyler (8 June 1826) and Heathcote (9 June 1826) are in the same source.

(3) The Report of the Municipal Commissioners on ... Coventry (Coventry, 1835), pp. 80 et seq.

apprenticeships some time before had not bothered to enrol.(1) They now did - their fees being paid for them openly by a servant of the corporation.(2) The prospect of entry to the Bablake Hospital for the aged relatives of Tory voters was held out in 1826 by the corporation: families agreed to pool their votes in the Tory interest in return for promises that their oldest members would be given places in the almshouse. The £4 gift of Sir Thomas White's charity - also of course under corporation control - was an inducement to more; at the 1826 election the alderman in charge of distributing the gift in each of the ten wards checked to see that those who had received or expected the gift did in fact go to the poll to vote for Heathcote and Fyler.(3) Robert Buckler, a local carpenter, was offered the contract to build the hustings if he would promise to vote for Fyler and Heathcote. He did so and was given the contract.(4) Above all, Goodall, the chief constable, John Carter, his brother Samuel (the gaoler at Coventry prison) and the mayor himself, recruited as election bullies to prevent Ellice and Moore voters from polling men such as John Ross, who had served several prison terms, including one for assault, and had acted as

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(1) I have calculated the figure mentioned from C.R.O: Freemen's Admission Books, 4 (November 1812 to July 1826) and 5 (July 1826 to April 1841).

(2) P.P: H.C. 547 (1835) viii: Report from the Select Committee on Bribery at Elections, p. 63.

(3) The Times, 19 June 1826. Calculations made in the margin of C.R.O: Council Minutes 16, 12 June 1827 and 3 June 1828 (by Richard Marriott for the Municipal Corporation Commissioners) were to the effect that at the next two distributions of the gift after the election 278 Fyler voters and only 33 Ellice men got the £4. After the election, a freeman who had voted for Ellice and Moore was told by the chief constable when he made application for the gift to 'stand away. You never put any water in the well, and therefore you can't expect any out.' Report of the Municipal Commissioners on ... Coventry, p. 86. See also C.R.O: Doggett Collection, Letters of John Carter, Petition of John Robinson and ten other members of the family of Thomas Hawley, to T.B. Fyler, 2 January 1828. The petition asks that Thomas Hawley 'a very poor infirm man upwards of 73 years of Age' should be given a Bablake place. '... the undersigned petitioners, who are all Freemen and branches of his family presented a similar petition to you on the same day that you were leaving Coventry after being Elected ... your complying with our Petition will ever lay us under the greatest obligation and beg you will command our services whenever wanted'. NB also the comment of the weaver Charles Curzon on his voting Tory: 'I am an old man, and I expect to have Bobblick'. P.P: H.C. 148 (1826-27) iv, p. 101.

(4) P.P: H.C. 148 (1826-27) iv, pp. 120 et seq. Buckler in fact voted for Ellice and Moore - a piece of trickery which led the mayor to threaten him with imprisonment.

a bully during the 1820 election, William Kettle ('fighting Kettle'), a collier, and 'Bulldog' Harris. They were promised 5s. or 8s. a day.(1)

Some of these intensive preparations could not be matched by the liberals, without corporation influence. The measures that were in their power they did not sufficiently take. Ellice does not seem to have got much return for the money he lavished on the election.(2) The defection of Pearman and some of the ward managers left a gap that was not filled. T.B. Troughton, Ellice's agent, did not attend meetings of the dark blue committee and seems to have known little of what was going on. Troughton's partner, Lea, seems to have paid the admission fees for few freemen. No preparations had been made to protect liberal voters against the attacks of the Tory bullies.(3) This was the fatal omission, which could not be repaired by the bribing of the London freemen at a meeting in Shoreditch that Ellice and Moore addressed, or by the threats of at least one Coventry ribbon manufacturer to refuse all further work for supporters of Fyler and Heathcote and to circulate the names of Tory voters to other liberal manufacturers.(4) Moreover, Ellice and Moore were not present in Coventry in the week before the election - thus missing an opportunity to counteract what The Times called 'the delusion practised on the freemen'.(5) It was in this week that the paper war was at its height, and the Tory broadsides exacerbated existing feelings against Ellice and Moore which the liberal replies and the addresses of the two candidates could not dispel - though animus was directed chiefly against Ellice, it is true. Ellice argued that he served both masters and men,

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(1) ibid., pp. 129 et seq. Many bullies were not paid in full. Ross was given only 14s.6d. and the promise of a new coat for five days' work. He went to see the mayor: 'he was being shaved at the time, and I waited till he was done; ... he spoke to me and said "Ross, I do not know what the devil they mean by sending you all to me, but here is 2s. for you"'. ibid., p. 130. Joseph Owen was given 25s. in all, and a pair of 'county shoes' by Samuel Carter, because he had lost his own in the fight.

(2) Ellice gave Troughton £950 in cash, in addition to an unknown amount paid by cheque. National Library of Scotland: Ellice Papers, E 143 (Cash book of Edward Ellice, 1824-1835).

(3) P.P: H.C. 148 (1825-27) iv, pp. 7, 75, 177; H.C. 547 (1835) viii, p. 63. The Blue Club was founded after this election partly to pay the admission fees for liberal freemen.

(4) P.P: H.C. 148 (1826-27) iv, pp. 72, 307. Coventry Herald, 9 June 1826. James Jenkins, the manufacturer who issued the threat, carrie it out. 300 Coventry freemen were present at the Shoreditch meeting.

(5) The Times, 14 June 1826.

because their interests were identical although the men might not realise it. When differences arose, as over the Combination Laws, he did not abandon the men. He blamed low wages on the corn laws, chiefly. He denied the charge about '10s. a week' emphatically - as did several liberal broadsides. Moore pointed to his labours in helping to obtain the repeal of the Combination Laws, and his hatred of the Corn Laws and 'specious new-fangled notions of free trade, in every article but CORN'.(1)

In the week that began on Monday 5 June growing crowds of weavers paraded through the city - led sometimes by the mayor and Aldermen Carter and Merridew - carrying empty gin bottles on top of poles (a reference to Ellice's alleged insult) and calling out 'Damn Ellice, he is the masters' man'.(2) Some of them were radicals who had voted for Cobbett and whose dislike of Ellice and their masters now led them to the populist Tories Fyler and Heathcote.(3) Charles Woodcock addressed a meeting of freemen on Greyfriars Green; they shouted 'No' when he asked them if they were satisfied with their present members. Afterwards Woodcock and Samuel Carter walked through the city at midnight with some of the bullies to break the windows of Ellice supporters.(4) 'The mobs constantly increased; their numbers increased their enthusiasm; by the end their prejudices amounted to deadly hatred.'(5) By Thursday 8 June Abraham Herbert, a liberal ribbon manufacturer, was so afraid for

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(1) C.W.C.: Broadsides Collection, To Mr. W. Rotherham, Printer, Coventry (address of Peter Moore), 1 June 1826. Bodleian Library: Gough Add. Warwickshire b.2, Peter Gregory, To the Weavers of Coventry, 1 June 1826, 'An Old Weaver', To the Freemen of Coventry, June 1826, To the Weavers of the City of Coventry, (address of Edward Ellice), 2 June 1826, 'A Young Weaver', To the Freemen of Coventry, 5 June 1826, To the Independent Freemen of the City of Coventry (second address of Edward Ellice), 9 June 1826.

(2) P.P.: H.C. 148 (1826-27) iv, pp. 8, 29.

(3) C.W.C.: Broadsides Collection, 'A Reformer', To the Freemen of Coventry who voted for Mr. Cobbett in 1820 and for Messrs Fyler and Heathcote in 1826, 26 January 1827. 'A Reformer' reproves them at length for betraying the cause of Reform in 1826 because of hatred of their masters: 'You, who had been the champions of reform ... you deserted to the enemy ... you opposed those principles that are dearest to Englishmen'. During the election, some Fyler supporters said to him, 'What do you think of the little Cobbites now, are we not good fellows?' P.P.: H.C. 148 (1826-27) iv, p. 24.

(4) P.P.: H.C. 148 (1826-27) iv, p. 138. Coventry Herald, 9 June 1826.

(5) The Times, 14 June 1826.

the safety of Ellice and Moore that he went to Daventry to meet them on the way from London - to counsel them not to enter Coventry in daylight, but to wait till nightfall. Ellice and Moore (whose courage was noted throughout the election) rejected this advice, and came to Coventry on Friday. Ellice then learned of a proposal the corporation had to ensure a quiet election; it showed how far the corporation's attitude was from the weavers'. The corporation offered to drop Fyler if Peter Moore would also leave the contest. At the same time, representatives of the weavers saw Peter Moore and offered to return him if he abandoned his alliance with Ellice. Both men refused these propositions and determined to fight on together. Ellice and Moore then attempted to address the electors from the favourite liberal sounding board, the balcony of the Craven Arms. Apart from the shouts of opponents - 'Fyler for ever', 'No Popery', and 'We won't have you' - Ellice and Moore were prevented from making themselves heard by a band placed directly beneath them, which played non-stop for five hours. The crowd was led by the town's police and watchmen, and the chief constable supplied liquor to the mob. In addition, 'a miserable negro was observed, with "NO POPERY" in his hat'.(1)

The polling began on Saturday 10 June, at the hustings in Cross Cheaping. The Tory tactic was to poll as many of their supporters as quickly as possible while preventing the liberal voters from approaching the booth: it was believed in Coventry that a majority in the first two days of the poll could not be overthrown, because most of the electors who then remained would decide to vote for the initial victors to get the 5s. paid to each supporter of the winners on 'chairing day' after the poll. Accordingly, when polling began a massed crowd of Tory supporters, led by the hired bullies, were stationed round the hustings so that the liberals could not with safety approach. 'All of Moore's and Ellice's friends, endeavouring to vote, were violently assaulted, and their cloathes torn off. With them the booth appeared completely thatched.'(2) The more fortunate liberals were merely 'Jefferied and Barlowed': a 'Jefferies and Barlow' was a Coventry election custom that dated from the contest of 1803; a crowd surrounded a smaller number of men and jumped up and down in unison while jostling

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(1) 'An Observer', Historical Sketches of the Coventry Election, pp. 35 et seq. Coventry Herald, 9 June 1826. The Times, 14 June 1826. P.P: H.C. 148 (1826-27) iv, pp. 9 et seq, 35.

(2) 'An Observer', Historical Sketches of the Coventry Election of June 1826, p. 44.

them with their elbows. The regular constables wore light blue, that is, Corporation and Tory, ribbons and ripped up the liberals' clothes with their staves. The Mayor and Aldermen Carter, Merridew and Whitwell were often to be seen round the polling booth, shaking hands with the Tory crowd; Whitwell distributed Tory handbills. Thomas Wilson, a Coventry freeman from Bethnal Green, approached the hustings. The mayor looked at him: 'What a black-looking fellow you are; I am sure you are an Ellice and Moore, you look so black'. Then the Tories ripped up his clothes.(1) The Tory crowd was constantly refreshed with gin and water; the gin was brought to them in two-gallon copper cans, stored in the mayor's parlour conveniently hear the hustings. Goodall and at times the mayor superintended the distribution of the drink. The mayor, the aldermen and the sheriffs took no notice of the liberals' complaints of violence or their requests to adjourn the poll. All they would concede was the enrolment of about fifty special constables on Tuesday 13 June; these were shopkeepers unsuited to keeping the peace at a Coventry election. In any case, they were provided merely with peeled osiers as a badge of office, not with staves as the regular constables were. They found that they could do nothing against the bullies, supported as these were by the regular police. Thus on the first day only 5 men polled for Ellice and 4 for Moore while 173 polled for Fyler and Heathcote; at the end of the second day the corresponding figures were 30, 29, and 621; at the end of the third, 203, 201, and 865. Some of these liberal voters were aged and infirm freemen allowed by special agreement to poll unmolested. Many able-bodied liberal electors were deterred from attempting to vote by the violence.(2)

Ellice continual courage and energy was commended by the correspondent of The Times. He refused to retire from the poll and remained sure of final victory if only his supporters stayed firm. Towards the end of the week they 'rallied the town' once and carried the poll; others managed to vote during lulls in the violence when at the mayor's request the bullies were temporarily withdrawn, or when the Tories were parading the town or were merely too tired. One spectator said that during the last four days of the poll the men in Cross Cheaping were at times playing at bowls, shuttlecock, cards and marbles. But The Times was very doubtful about Ellice's

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(1) P.P: H.C. 148 (1826-27) iv, p. 70.

(2) ibid., pp. 5, 12 et seq, 16 et seq, 75 et seq, 124 et seq, 143 et seq, 162, 191. The Times, 14 June, 16 June 1826.

chances of victory: though his courage and his energy in canvassing made him increasingly popular the Tory lead at the start of the poll gave them a great advantage. The Tory candidates, Fyler particularly, aroused only contempt for their stupidity. 'The talents of one but barely amount to mediocrity, and those of the other would seem to fall far short of it.'(1) 'Mr. Fyler read something from a paper in the crown of his hat, with which no doubt we should have been highly edified if we had been so fortunate as to understand it.'(2) On the eighth day of the poll, Monday 19 June, the riot began as soon as the poll opened. Ellice appealed to Fyler and Heathcote for fair play and as a result they asked the mob to give the dark blues free access. They did so and Ellice and Moore drew ahead rapidly; they were ninety votes ahead on the morning's poll. The Tory mob, therefore, was once again sent to attack; more clothes were ripped up. Ellice decided that it was unfair to his supporters to ask them to suffer further violence and withdrew from the contest. The final poll was: Heathcote 1535, Fyler 1522, Ellice 1242, Moore 1182. There were still 170 unpolled electors in the city, of whom 74 were ineligible to vote, as paupers or almsmen.(3)

There followed the triumphal chairing of the victors round the city, on chairs covered with sky-blue satin with a silver fringe, and the victory dinner in St. Mary's Hall, where leading Tories and corporators were present, Alderman Whitwell was quite unrepentant over the corporation's part in the contest, Heathcote's toast was enthusiastically drunk, and the Rev. F.G. Perkins of Stoke thanked the corporation and the Coventry Tories for the help they had given to the Established Church.(4) At the liberal dinner in the Craven Arms, Thomas Cope, Abraham Herbert, H.C. Adams of Ansty Hall, James Beck of Allesley Hall and Charles Lilly 'the veteran champion of the blue cause' were the chief guests. Ellice once again repudiated the slander that he favoured the masters against the weavers. He regretted that the weavers, instead of using against their masters the powers released by the repeal of the Combination Acts, had visited

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(1) The Times, 21 June 1826. The Times added that these men were preferred by 'the corrupt and grovelling magistracy of the City of Coventry, ... to a gentleman who ranks with the first of British merchants, who is allied to the most able and patriotic of the British nobility, and who has gained a respectable reputation in the Commons House of Parliament'.

(2) ibid., 19 June 1826.

(3) For this paragraph see ibid., 14 June, 16 June, 17 June, 19 June, 21 June, and P.P: H.C. 148 (1826-27) iv, pp. 20, 59, 261, 314, 323. See also A Correct Copy of the Poll ... June 1826 (Coventry, 1826), p. 91.

(4) Coventry Herald, 23 June 1826.

their resentment upon him. He defended the opening of the ports to foreign ribbons; prohibition had been ineffective against the smugglers and it was impossible to restore it. Coventry must strive to compete with France. But, he thought, justice required that there should be free trade all round: the Corn Laws should be repealed. He defended Catholic Emancipation, as an act of justice to Ireland. He bitterly attacked the 'profligate and base magistracy' which had exploited feeling against the ribbon masters and him, and fomented violence. A petition against the election result was promised.(1) The select committee that followed Ellice's petition found that Fyler and Heathcote had been elected, but that 'riotous and tumultuous proceedings' had occurred and that the mayor and magistrates had been 'culpably negligent of their duty in taking no effectual measures to preserve the peace of the City'. The committee recommended that a bill be introduced to give the Warwickshire magistrates concurrent jurisdiction with those of the County of the City of Coventry.(2) A bill to give effect to this recommendation was passed by the Commons in June 1827, but was thrown out by the Lords.(3)

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(1) ibid., 30 June 1826. The Times, 28 June 1826. 'An Observer', op. cit., pp. 55 et seq.

(2) P.P: H.C. 147 (1826-27) iv, pp. 1 et seq.

(3) The bill is in P.P: H.C. (1826-27) ii. There were several petitions to the Commons for the bill, and one from the corporation against it. Its request for counsel to be heard against the bill was agreed, but the bill passed its third reading - the essential vote being 64: 53 - on 19 June. The corporation petitioned the Lords and its request for counsel to be heard in that house was agreed - but the bill was dropped before the second reading. Journals of the House of Commons, lxxxii (1826-27), pp. 297, 483 et seq, 536 et seq, 576. Journals of the House of Lords, lix (1826-27), pp. 423, 438 et seq.

V

Foreign competition: Crisis in the Ribbon Trade, 1828-1830

The underlying weakness of the weavers' position was analogous to that after the collapse of the big purl time, and was due to a similar cause, the excessive growth of the industry's productive power. Under the prohibitory system the industry had flourished - a fact often mentioned by the opponents of repeal in the Commons debates of the 1820s. Imports of raw and thrown silk rose from an average of 715,000 lbs in the years 1765, 66 and 67 to about 2,300,000 lbs in 1814. This rise indicates the growing prosperity of the silk industry in general, in which the ribbon trade shared. But even at this time the chronic structural underemployment in the industry was responsible for the idleness of many weavers in the winter months. The big purl time introduced a novel intensivity of demand and a hectic pressure of work: the result was the influx into the trade of far more weavers than it could support in times of normal demand. This seems to have returned to the ribbon industry by 1818, for in that year almost as much silk was imported as in 1814, and almost twice as much as had, on average, been imported between 1801 and 1812. Yet distress was far more general in 1818 than it had been ten years earlier.

From about 1820 there was an improvement in the position of the weavers which is reflected in higher earnings, the greater strength of the list, and the abatement of poverty. This seems to indicate a rising demand for ribbons, and this is indeed implied by the high imports of raw and thrown silk in these years; 2,642,000 lbs were brought in in 1820, slightly less the next year, but more the next, and 2,880,000 lbs in 1823. And the average annual value of all silk manufactures in the years 1821-23 was over £6,000,000, compared to £4,000,000 between 1815 and 1817 and £5,300,000 between 1818 and 1820. It is unfortunately impossible to know what proportion

of these figures relates to the ribbon trade, but the evidence suggests that in this part of the silk trade demand more nearly approached supply. Certainly, about 1820 the taste for silk goods spread from the upper classes downwards and this stimulated demand. Still, one estimate was that even at this time of comparative equilibrium, all the hands in the ribbon trade could produce in nine months' continuous work all its annual production.(1)

The effect of the measures of 1824 was a fever of innovation and improvement in Coventry. The profits of the boom of 1824 and 1825 were used to buy engine-looms and to add the Jacquard apparatus to many of them. By 1828 or 1829 there were 4,000 engine-looms in north Warwickshire, an increase of one third in ten years; many had the Jacquard apparatus attached. In 1823 there were only 5 looms in Coventry with Jacquard apparatuses attached, though this had been invented in 1801. The desire to be ready to compete with France in the field where she excelled, the making of fancy ribbons, led to a great investment in Jacquards; these made possible the more rapid weaving of very elaborate ribbons. Previously, these had not been woven on the engine-loom, and had been made only very slowly on the single-hand loom. Figured ribbons were indeed uncommon in Warwickshire before the investment boom. By 1826 219 engine-looms had Jacquard apparatuses attached and by about 1829 there had been a further increase to between 650 and 700. At times during these years of rapid investment orders for looms could not be met despite an increase in the number of loom makers. French mechanics came to Coventry to instruct weavers in the use of these new looms. The desire to improve the skills of Coventry weavers was one of the explicit motives for the suggestion, made in 1825, for the foundation of a mechanics' institution in the city.

The Jacquard apparatus added considerably to the height of the engine-loom; houses were altered to accommodate them - floors and ceilings being broken through. Many new houses were built too, for the engine and Jacquard looms, and the beginning of the new suburb of Hillfields (or New Town) in 1828 was the most notable topographical result of the investment boom. The bricks and mortar of weavers' cottages soon covered the area remembered by Joseph Gutteridge as a 'wild and romantic' place in his boyhood in the 1820s, the resort of 'the wild duck, the widgeon, the dipper and the water hen'. Many weavers' houses were also built in Foleshill

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(1) P.P: H.C. 678 (1831-32) xix, pp. 10, 423, 858 et seq; [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 8 et seq, 54. Mitchell and Deane, op. cit., p. 207.

between 1825 and 1827. At the same time, there were improvements in the dyeing process in Coventry, and the desire to compete in English markets in the new lines of fancy ribbons produced by the improved looms led some manufacturers to send travellers throughout the land to build up a connection among the country retailers.(1)

The result of the investment boom was that the capacity of the industry outstripped the demand for ribbons, especially since the engine-looms produced so much more than the single-hand looms. Thus the ribbon masters found, even during the good years, that the price they could obtain for their goods was too low to enable them to pay much to the weavers; the bitter competition between manufacturers forced down the price they got from dealers for 2dy sarsnets to 1s.11d. in July 1824 - 20% less than a few years before. They were urged by 'A manufacturer' - a paternalist of the old school who wrote repeatedly to the newspapers - to apply to the evil of over-production the ancient remedy of giving out half-work to sustain prices. They did not, persisting in their competition. Their inability collectively to limit production was paralleled by the dealers' inability to pay a higher price: and thus rendered nugatory the suggestion of some paternalist ribbon masters that the dealers should be persuaded to pay more for ribbon so that the manufacturers could pay higher wages to weavers. Yet the import of raw and thrown silk in these years remained high and imply a high demand for ribbon: nearly 3,500,000 lbs came in in 1824, and even more in 1825; in 1826 the figures dropped but 1827 and 1828 were years of record imports of the raw material, nearly 4,800,000 lbs entering in the latter year. In 1828 the value of silks manufactured in Britain was £6,534,000.(2)

When French and Swiss ribbons at last began seriously to compete in the British market the prosperity of the masters ceased and weavers, already poor, became poorer; foreign competition exacerbated the underlying problem of an excess of looms and of labour. By 1828 the continental manufacturers had sought out and obtained channels for their ribbons. The Swiss and French manufacturers sent in enormous quantities of plain ribbon, and the French

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(1) P.P.: H.C. 678 (1831-32) xix, pp. 70 et seq, 81 et seq, 414; [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 9 et seq. Coventry Herald, 15 July, 21 October 1825. Parliamentary Debates, new series, xiv, p. 744. Benjamin Poole, Coventry: its History and Antiquities (London, 1870), pp. 397, 411. Joseph Gutteridge, op. cit., pp. 17 et seq.

(2) Coventry Herald, 23 July 1824, 26 August 1825, 21 April, 28 April 1826, 19 October 1827. P.P.: H.C. 678 (1831-32) xix, pp. 10, 869. Mitchell and Deane, op. cit., p. 207.

sent also large quantities of fancy ribbons, particularly the variety known as gauzes, in the production of which so much effort had been placed by the Warwickshire manufacturers since 1824.(1)

The Swiss plain ribbons were much cheaper than Coventry's - despite the duty - and declined in price by between 10% and 12½% between 1827 and 1832. Between 1826 and 1829 the price of French ribbons dropped too, by about one quarter, and one special problem was the French habit of dumping unsold ribbons towards the end of the season. In 1825 about 437,000 francs worth of French ribbons were exported to England - they were of course smuggled - and by 1831 almost 2,000,000 francs worth were. The need to compete with continental producers helped to cause the disastrous decline in rates of payment to weavers in Warwickshire from 1828 onwards. In lowering the prices for their goods the Warwickshire manufacturers soon defeated Swiss and French competition in the plain trade and the cheaper fancy trade, but not French competition in the most expensive fancy trade. The French manufacturers enjoyed certain advantages which gave them lower basic costs than Coventry's: their silk was cheaper and sometimes of better quality, since they had a monopoly of their native silk (which could not be exported) and it included the best silk in the world, and since even the new lower British duties on imported thrown silk raised theprices of some Coventry ribbons by 5% or 6%. British manufacturers brought highly complex calculations to prove that wages were lower in France, and one Coventry ribbon master, Cleophas Ratliff, alleged (in wild ignorance of the French climate) that the weavers of Lyons had been so favoured by God that they needed no fires and less food that Coventrians - and so they could live well on much less than Warwickshire men. But these advantages, whether real or imaginary, were admitted by Coventry men themselves not to explain the continued French success in the upper-class fancy trade after the price of Coventry ribbons was so much lowered. For because of the tariff most varieties of French ribbon were more expensive than Coventry's: yet even so they were preferred by the British upper-class consumer, in the highest class of trade where price was of little moment. Thus Ratliff found that a French ribbon selling at 48s. was preferred to a Coventry one, at least equal in craftsmanship and selling at 36s.(2)

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(1) P.P.: H.C. 678 (1831-32) xix, pp. 100 et seq, 149, 412 et seq.

(2) P.P.: H.C. 678 (1831-32) xix, pp. 26 et seq, 94 et seq, 137, 219 et seq, 300, 388 et seq, 412 et seq, 434, 584, 852 et seq; [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 9 et seq, 19 et seq.

When members of the ribbon trade and those who sympathised with them sought to explain the preference for French ribbons in the highest class of trade they expressed baffled rage at the female caprice that preferred French fashions to the equal English product, or at the snobbery of women who preferred ribbons - even ugly ribbons - that were 'not comeatable by vulgar people'(1) because they were dear: so that the high tariff became regarded, by implication, as a positive advantage to the Frenchman. These notions were brusquely demolished by John Bowring, free trade fanatic and Board of Trade official. 'The preference for French silk goods is no more a prejudice than is a preference for the works of Raphael a prejudice.'(2) When Coventrians praised their craftsmanship they had in mind the durability of their ribbons - the fastness of their colours and the way they stood up to a lifetime of use. In these qualities they equalled French ribbons - but they were not the only things purchasers - especially upper-class purchasers - looked for. In the designs of its fancy ribbons the Coventry trade was inferior to France's. Despite the investment in Jacquard mechanisms since 1824, the Coventry trade could not weave designs as elaborate or complex. The density of pattern depended partly on the number of needles, to guide the warp threads, in the Jacquard mechanism. As late as 1838 the highest number of needles in a Jacquard in Coventry was 600 and there were not many looms with this amount; most had only 400. But at the same time the best machines in St. Etienne had 1050 needles and there were many with 900. Above all, Coventry was vastly inferior in her ability to design the patterns. There was no Warwickshire equivalent to the school of design in Lyons with its 180 students taking a five-year course. Coventry's designers were not trained at all, there were very few good ones, and even they got no more than half a crown for the design itself, 'their livelihood being derived from the merely mechanical operation of drafting the patterns upon chequered paper for the reader, who, with the stamper, transfers the pattern from the chequered drawing to the cards of the machine'.(3) So it is not surprising that the designs themselves were often made by imitating French patterns in an attempt to catch the market;

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(1) P.P.: H.C. 678 (1831-32) xix, p. 150.

(2) ibid., p. 520.

(3) P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 16.

sometimes a variation was introduced by cutting old patterns up with scissors and then gluing the pieces back together in a different order. The conversion of the manufacturers to the cause of competitive efficiency and technical progress, about 1824, came too late and was too superficial.(1)

The impact of French competition upon the trade was catastrophic. The masters were pressed under by internecine competition and could get only very reduced prices for their ribbons from the 'slaughter-houses', the London wholesalers with large reserves of capital and no gentlemanly conventions of business. They were always ready to buy for cash; and their ready money was very welcome to the manufacturers, since they were given shorter credit by the silk merchants than had once been usual; in 1826 this was for ten months, but by about 1832 it was down to five, with 2½% discount for ready cash. The silk merchants were prudent: there was a spate of bankruptcies among manufacturers. Few Jacquards were bought after 1829 and many looms of all types were indeed jobbed off for as little as one quarter of the price that had been paid for them a few years before. Richard Cox had 300 engine and Jacquard looms in 1826 and 19 five years later.(2)

The effect upon the weavers, in a trade already chronically overstocked with labour, was to plunge them into misery and destitution. Many fancy weavers were forced to abandon their craft when this part of the Warwickshire trade was decimated, and turn instead to plain weaving. This required much less time and skill, and so the amount paid normally for weaving plain ribbon was much less than for the same length of figured ribbon: this was part of the explanation for the seeming paradox that the total amount paid to weavers during these years of slump, as compared with the years before, fell much more dramatically than the amount of silk consumed in the weaving area during the same period. But a more important reason was that the competition of weavers with each other in the plain trade, now more overcrowded than ever, enabled or forced manufacturers to cut earnings so as to meet continental competition in this branch.(3) In the spring of 1829, out of just over 5,000 looms in the city, 2,047 were totally unemployed and 2,981 partly employed. What is startling is that the feelings of paternalism among some masters were

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(1) P.P.: H.C. 678 (1831-32) xix, pp. 21 et seq, 41 et seq, 82 et seq, 121 et seq, 414 et seq, 432 et seq, 454, 520 et seq, 850 et seq; [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 16.

(2) P.P.: H.C. (678) xix, pp. 41 et seq, 70, 84, 109, 117, 271 et seq

(3) ibid., pp. 33, 44, 69, 81, 111, 128 et seq, 247.

still so strong as to lead them to resist the proposal by some colleagues that a new lower list should be issued. But the paternalists could not win. There had for some time been encroachments upon the 1826 list, and these continued in a more open form; even the fiction of a general list was dropped.(1)

Since the notoriety which its activities in the election of 1826 had brought it the corporation was anxious to discourage violence. His fears for public order at a time of rising tension led the mayor, Samuel Whitwell, to write to the Home Secretary in May to ask that the 14th Light Dragoons should not be moved from the city: the weavers were frequently assembling and though no breach of the peace had occurred disorder was feared. Whitwell was right to be concerned. Tempers were rising. On 1 June the house of Richard Woodcock, one of the reducing masters, was attacked by a crowd of weavers:

> ... they broke several hundred of my windows and were only deterred from destroying me and my family, by my standing at the imminent hazard of my life with a loaded blunderbuss in my hand, threatening to discharge the contents into the body of the first man that presumed to put his foot on my premises; to this desperate resource I attribute the salvation of my life and property.(2)

The reduction of the tariff on imported ribbons in July 1829 caused the situation to worsen. Even the paternalist masters were now certain that a reduced list was essential to meet foreign competition. The manufacturers met, published a new list for the engine trade which was 15% lower than the list of 1826, and accompanied it with a public declaration to explain their conduct.

> As the ribbon trade, in common with others at the present time, is suffering from the effects of a combination of political evils, the following reduced list of prices for weaving, is agreed to by the manufacturers. It must, however, be evident that these prices will afford but a scanty supply of the necessaries of life; and it is therefore hoped that a change of circumstances may ere long warrant a list of prices more beneficial to the trade.(3)

Another list for the single-hand trade followed shortly. Yet some masters maintained that even these reductions were insufficient and refused to sign the new list. One of them was Richard Woodcock, whose country house about two miles from the city was attacked by a crowd which he estimated, probably exaggeratedly, at 3,000:

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(1) Coventry Observer, 12 March, 19 March, 2 April 1829. Coventry Herald, 16 March 1832. P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 219.

(2) P.R.O.: H.O. 40/23, S. Whitwell to Sir Robert Peel, 7 May 1829; H.O. 40/24/2, R. Woodcock to Sir Robert Peel, 18 September 1829.

(3) P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 219.

> ... these commenced an attack upon my gardens and out-houses, stealing my fruit, pulling up by the roots and otherwise destroying the whole of my shrubs and fruit trees, and were proceeding to enter the house through the roof, the house being strongly barricaded in all other directions, when the fortunate appearance of a magistrate put a stop to these proceedings and saved my family and property!(1)

The magistrates forbade public meetings. There was a general strike. There were breaches of the peace and a general strike at Nuneaton. At Atherstone on the edge of the weaving area there were disturbances, and reports of weavers 'going about the country with military music'; the local magistrates swore in 140 special constables and asked for a troop of horse in case of trouble. George Chetwynd was afraid of a riotous combination of Atherstone hatters, Nuneaton ribbon weavers and Hinckley stocking weavers, with which the civil power could not cope.

In both Coventry and Nuneaton there was a general fear that a further reduction in earnings would cause cumulative destitution through rising poor rates. The self-interest of each town, and in Coventry the traditional sympathy of the Tory corporation for the weavers, worked strongly for them. In Nuneaton distress led to an increase in the number of claimants on the poor rate and an alarming decrease in the number of payers to it: fears for the solvency of the rate-fund led J.H. Buchanan to take the desperate and bizarre step of asking Peel if the town could claim some benefit from some national source. In the combined Coventry parishes there were great increases in the number of paupers and the cost of their relief.(2) Thus in September 1829 the Directors of the Poor called for a meeting of the manufacturers and the magistrates, where the masters were prevailed upon to agree that further reductions were unnecessary; even Richard Woodcock was eventually brought to agree to pay by the list of September. Samuel Johnson and Benjamin Poole, two of the weavers' leaders, thanked the mayor and magistrates for their help and sympathy. In Nuneaton too adherence to the list was agreed on.(3)

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(1) P.R.O.: H.O. 40/24/2, R. Woodcock to Sir Robert Peel, 18 September 1829.

(2) See the tables in the appendix.

(3) Coventry Observer, 17 September, 24 September, 1 October, 8 October 1829. P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 219, 236 et seq. P.R.O.: 40/24/2, Richard Woodcock to Sir Robert Peel, 18 September 1829, J.H. Buchanan to Peel, 24 September 1829, George Chetwynd to Peel, 29 September 1829. C.R.O.. Proceedings of the Guardians of the Poor, pp. 154 et seq.

The weavers had won a victory - if one might call a victory the promise to retain a list which gave to an engine weaver in full employ an average of 9s.10d. a week (after paying loom hire) as compared with 17s.1½d. a week by the list of 1819. The full work needed to bring even this amount was now lacking: indeed the list itself was abandoned within three months. Another distress fund was subscribed in September - there had already been one in June, to which the corporation had given £50 - and by January 1830 soup was being distributed to thousands, and the press for it in Spon Street was so great that two people were severely injured. At the same date there were 454 people in the workhouse and 1,395 families on casual poor relief - nearly 300 more than in January 1817; in 1829 the rate for St. Michael's was 15s.2d. and for Holy Trinity 10s.7d. - and was kept to these relatively low amounts by the Directors' overdrawing at their bank to the extent of £4,546.16s.10d a sum equal to about 30% of the amount raised by the rate.(1) There was little the weavers could do to sustain the list in these circumstances. In November a meeting of Coventry weavers agreed to closer action with those of Foleshill, Bulkington, Bedworth and Nuneaton and decided that in future the members of the Weavers' Committee should be paid, by levies from the weavers, to compensate them for lack of earnings. This step towards a permanent trade union organisation could not be of immediate help. Advised by their committee, the weavers did not strike against the abandonment of the list. Despair was general at the end of 1829.(2)

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(1) P.P.: H.C. 678 (1831-32) xix, p. 54; [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 219. Coventry Observer, 18 June 1829, 7 January, 11 February 1830. C.R.O.: Proceedings of the Guardians of the Poor, pp. 98, 158 et seq.

(2) Coventry Observer, 15 October, 12 November 1829.

VI

Coventry against Manchester: Attitudes in the Ribbon Trade

Though they differed from them on the question of how far they should be expected to bear the consequences of free trade, the weavers of Coventry were at one with their masters in abominating it. Thus from the autumn of 1828 onwards the weavers were constantly holding meetings to protest against the admission of foreign ribbons and to frame memorials to the Board of Trade and petitions to the House of Commons asking for prohibition. Several weavers now came to the fore as new leaders of this campaign - Benjamin Poole, Edward Goode, Samuel Johnson, Thomas Pettifor and William Fletcher; Poole was born in 1800 and Goode too seems to have been a young man; by contrast, Peter Gregory is no longer mentioned in the sources.(1) The climax of the campaign was the motion of Thomas Bilcliffe Fyler, Tory M.P. for Coventry since 1826, for a select committee on the silk trade in April 1829: the importation of foreign silk goods had ruined Coventry; it ought to be stopped. Vesey Fitzgerald, the President of the Board of Trade, trusted to the beneficent operation of market forces to alleviate Coventry's suffering: competition would lower prices and thus raise the consumption of silk goods. Fitzgerald rightly argued that the entire prohibition of imports of silk goods was impracticable because it would require the application of draconian measures against smugglers so long as the preference for French silks lasted. Fyler's motion was lost by 31 votes to 149.(2)

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(1) Coventry Observer, 12 June, 26 June, 18 December 1828, 5 February, 12 February, 26 March, 30 April, 7 May 1829. P.P.: H.C. 678 (1831-32) xix, p. 52; H.C. 341 (1835) xiii: Report and Minutes of Evidence from the Select Committee on the Handloom Weavers, p. 231. Journals of the House of Commons, lxxxiii (1828), p. 512.

(2) Journals of the House of Commons, lxxxiv (1829), pp. 85 et seq, for the silk trade petitions. Parliamentary Debates, new series, xx, p. 608, xxi, pp. 744 et seq, 756 et seq, 818 et seq. The free trade question was currently the subject of pamphlet debate: Richard Badnall, A View of the Silk Trade with Remarks on the Recent Measures of Government (London, 1828); John Ballance, Remarks on Some of the Important Errors in Mr. Badnall's Pamphlet (London, 1829); John Prout, Practical View of the Silk Trade (Macclesfield, 1829).

Fitzgerald proposed to discourage smuggling by lowering the effective rate of duty on imported silk goods. The recent fall in the cost of imported silks had meant an increase in the effective rate of the duties by weight imposed in the act of 1826(1) and thus there had been as a result a rise in the profits of smuggling. Fitzgerald proposed a return to ad valorem duties, with an option to the customs officers of charging duties by weight if these seemed fairer on items of very high value: 25% was proposed for plain silks and 30% for fancy, the expense of smuggling being calculated at between 24% and 30%. Fitzgerald also proposed several other measures more to the liking of Coventry: reducing the duty on imported thrown silk to assist British manufacturers (though this of course was resented by British throwsters), and limiting the number of ports at which silk goods could enter and laying down a minimum size for the ships in which they could be imported, to discourage smuggling.(2) Fyler tried again when the bill to give effect to Fitzgerald's proposals was discussed, arguing at the committee stage that the reduction in duties would be disastrous for Coventry. His motion attracted little support. It was defeated by ninety votes to twenty-two.(3) When the third reading occurred Fyler said that he would not oppose it since he knew it would be fruitless to do so.(4) The bill received the royal assent on 22 May. By the act the duties on imported thrown silk were reduced, and those on silk goods became duties on value instead of on weight; in effect, they were also reduced at the same time, plain silks (including plain ribbons) bearing duties of 25% and fancy silks duties of between 30% and 35%.(5)

For some years the restoration of the prohibitory laws was an aim shared by masters and men. It was an article of faith in Coventry that though lower protective duties were bad, higher ones would not suffice to defend the trade from French competition; the fashionable preference for French high-class fancy ribbons would always pull them over the tariff wall. More importantly, the prices of Coventry's plain ribbons were depressed by French competition 'Now this is very plain, that it is all fudge to say we are protected

(1) 7 Geo. IV, c. 53.

(2) Parliamentary Debates, new series, xxi, pp. 761 et seq.

(3) Parliamentary Debates, new series, xxi, pp. 889 et seq, 914 et seq. Journals of the House of Commons, lxxxiv (1829), pp. 251 et seq.

(4) Parliamentary Debates, new series, xxi, p. 1241.

(5) 10 Geo. IV, c. 23. Journals of the House of Commons, lxxxiv (1829), p. 328.

by 25 or 30 per cent.'(1) The only sufficient means to ensure prosperity to the Coventry trade was complete prohibition of imports, allied naturally with strong rights of search and seizure to find continental ribbons, payments to informers, and very heavy punishments for smugglers; one of the Spitalfields manufacturers who agreed with Coventry on this question thought that the treadmill should be the smuggler's penalty. And after prohibition, it was disarmingly pointed out, English women could continue to enjoy French fashions because British manufacturers would copy them, from patterns admitted by a kindly Treasury especially for this purpose.(2)

The ribbon trade's belief that foreign competition was essentially unfair and that the balance had to be redressed by all the power of the state was never accepted by the government or the advocates of commercial liberalism, despite the efforts of the trade to impress its views on them. From 1830 onwards the Board of Trade was controlled by men thoroughly committed to the doctrines of commercial liberalism, but even before then, in May 1829, it had refused to see any further deputations from Coventry and Spitalfields: it was useless to discuss further the question of prohibition.(3) The Board of Trade believed that the remedy for smuggling was to reduce the duty to the level at which it ceased to be profitable; for this reason John Bowring argued in 1832 that the duty should be lowered to 20%. All experience showed that when smuggling was profitable the most draconian measures could not eliminate it; the failure of France and Spain to close their borders to contraband was proof of this. Prohibition was bound to be ineffective. Indeed, since it was 'the encouragement given to imperfection', it would raise the price of Coventry ribbons, and thus add to the inducements to smuggle.(4)

The only measure, argued Bowring, which would enable the Coventry ribbon trade to survive and prosper was to expose it to the salutary competition of the more efficient French industry: whose energy and drive was a function partly of the competition it faced from Switzerland and England. This had led to the adoption of the

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(1) Coventry Herald, 10 June 1831.

(2) P.P.: H.C. 678 (1831-32) xix, pp. 19, 28 et seq, 42 et seq, 84 et seq, 101 et seq, 130 et seq, 147, 467 et seq, 486 et seq, 668, 705 et seq, 734.

(3) Coventry Observer, 7 May 1829. Lucy Brown, The Board of Trade and the Free Trade Movement, 1830-42 (Oxford, 1958), pp. 15 et seq.

(4) P.P.: H.C. 678 (1831-32) xix, pp. 586 et seq.

bar and Jacquard looms. The value of English exports of silk goods to France had risen from £119,000 in 1820 to £643,000 in 1830; they were mostly bandana handkerchiefs and there were few ribbons because of the inefficiency of the Warwickshire trade. That alone among France's industries silk was prosperous was due to foreign competition. The lesson was rammed home repeatedly: the relationship between degrees of protection and inefficiency, discernible already in the British and French silk industries, was paralleled in the cotton industries - but here the British industry was the more efficient because the less protected. The French cotton manufacturer was guarded by prohibitory laws and the exporter of cotton cloth enjoyed a high bounty: so French cotton cloth exports languished while those of Britain bounded ahead. The silk industry should regard the cotton industry as its exemplar; if protection were removed entirely the silk industry would improve greatly. 'Wherever ignorance and inferiority have remained unprotected, intelligence and superiority have taken their place.'(1) And, added Bowring, pointing out with monotonous reiteration that imports had to be paid for by exports, the demand for the reimposition of the prohibitory laws was a demand for a curb on not only the efficiency of the silk trade but the profitability of cotton too. 'The demand for the prohibition of French silk goods, is, after all, only a demand that England should not export cotton goods to France.'(2) Coventry must sacrifice herself for Manchester's sake or save herself by Manchester's example: indeed must save herself because of Manchester's direct threat, since, as an Essex silk manufacturer who supported free trade and was bitterly contemptuous of Coventry's inefficiency pointed out, if the Manchester silk manufacturers took up in earnest the making of plain ribbons then their superior efficiency would crush that branch of the Coventry trade as Lyons had crushed the high-class fancy.(3)

Some of the attitudes possessed by the Coventry trade were harmful to everybody in it - masters and men. The trade's fatalism about the inevitable victory of expensive French fancy ribbons, and its habit of explaining this by reference to the unreasoning fashion for French silks, reflected an underlying lack of self-confidence and was unproductive. Lyons' superiority in the high-class trade arose

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(1) P.P.: H.C. 678 (1831-32) xix, p. 594.

(2) ibid., p. 627.

(3) ibid., pp. 382, 521 et seq, 568, 586 et seq.

largely from the strength of its technical education for weavers and designers. This the Coventry trade could and should have emulated - as the Coventry Herald recommended it to, as it recommended it to send more deputations abroad to learn from superior technology; nothing was known in Coventry, for example, of the weaving techniques of the Swiss. The proponents of a mechanics' institution in Coventry hoped to benefit the ribbon trade directly with a drawing class, but the ribbon masters neither took up the original suggestion to found an institution in 1825 nor supported sufficiently the one that was founded in 1828; the masters as a whole did not see where their best interest lay - or did not have the energy resolutely to prosecute it. The bustling investment of the mid-1820s was inadequate because it was undertaken tardily - and more importantly because the masters did not change their fundamental attitudes when they opened their pockets. Had the ribbon masters put in hand some intensive training of ribbon designers then the victory of the French high-class fancy trade after 1828 might not have been complete: the masters would have benefited both themselves and their weavers.(1)

In this instance the short-term and the long-term interests of the masters and the weavers were truly in harmony, and would have been seen to be so had either side realised the need in the first place. But technical education would not have removed French price-competition in the plain trade, and was only one of the remedies proposed for the ribbon trade by the zealots of free trade and thrustful capitalism. They believed that if the industry were to be fully competitive in the long term against all-comers - the Swiss, the French, the Mancunians - then wages within it ought to be governed strictly by market forces, productivity raised by the adoption wherever possible of steam power and its corollary, the factory, and all artificial limitations on the output of individual workers ruthlessly swept away.(2) In all these instances the material interest of the masters would have been served by change - on the narrow interpretation given to 'interest' by John Bowring and men like Richard Woodcock who wished to throw off the trammels of

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(1) Charles Dupin, The Manufactures and Commerce of Lyons (Coventry, 1829), pp. 6 et seq. P.P.: H.C. 678 (1831-32) xix, pp. 512, 523, 533 et seq. Coventry Herald, 15 July 1825, 3 August 1827, 3 September, 10 September 1830. C.W.C.: Coventry Miscellany (Broadsides), i, Address from the Provisional Committee of the Coventry Mechanics' Institution, 30 September 1828.

(2) P.P.: H.C. 678 (1831-32) xix, pp. 372 et seq, 628.

paternalism. It would not have served the interest (as they themselves saw it) of masters like Lilly, who preferred to cut-throat capitalism a high and friendly standing in the community and the diminution of competition between both masters and men, and master and master. But even they had far less to lose than the weavers for whom the medicine of change was proposed.

Bowring, for example, made no bones about the effects of the changes he thought necessary upon the weavers of Warwickshire. Wages would drop. The industry was overstocked with labour whose fate would be harsh, but it would be harshest if an industrially inefficient Britain lost her export markets. There was no way, in the long run, of giving to Coventry's weavers a larger remuneration than market forces entitled them to. And it was kindness to let the market forces operate now, rather than later. 'Distress exists, and it demands all sympathy, but a great deal of distress does exist from the very fact that two and two make four ... you have a great deal of misdirected labour, and in some departments a great excess of labourers.'(1)

Of the truth of this statement the weavers were only too well aware; it was often advanced to them by masters as a reason for the reduction of earnings. In 1818 there were 8,491 looms in Warwickshire, 3,008 of them engine-looms; by 1831 the number of looms had risen to 14,602, about 4,400 of them engine-looms.(2) The amount of silk manufactured went up in the same period, but there was an excess of productive capacity at the beginning and at the end. The expansion had been pushed forward by demographic forces over which the weavers had no control, and by the efforts of masters who extended the industry almost always beyond the limits of a market for ribbons which was itself expanding. Indeed journeymen were constantly setting up as masters on their own account, with the aid of credit freely available from dyers and silk brokers - thus increasing the industry's productive capacity. And whether the expansion itself was involuntary or not, some masters organised their entire system of production round the surplus so as to exploit it to the full.

Thus by 1830 the structure of the industry was rather like that of a large estate with a core of constantly cultivated fertile soil

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(1) P.P.: H.C. 678 (1831-32) xix, p. 628.

(2) P.P.: H.C. 134 (1818) ix, p. 7; H.C. 678 (1831-32) xix, p. 81; [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 12, 53.

and concentric circles of increasingly marginal land round it. In the most constant employment were the loom-shops which had arisen very largely since the investment boom of 1826; the number of looms in such shops in 1830 is not known but in 1838 there were 598 (of which 53 were steam-powered) out of a total of 4,859 looms in the city and suburbs. Almost all the loom-shop looms were engine-looms and most of them were Jacquards. There were similar loom-shops in Bedworth and Nuneaton too. The looms in the shops were owned by the manufacturers, whose journeymen employees, though they were paid by the piece, were in other respects in the same position as the mill-hands of Lancashire. But though as a result they lacked the freedom and independence of the first-hand journeymen of the city - the outdoor weavers who owned their looms and who worked at home with the aid of journeymen's journeymen - their position was much less precarious. For the loom-shop owners took care to keep their own looms, in which their capital was sunk, as constantly employed as they could, and even supplied them with the best silk. They also kept in their employ almost three times as many looms belonging to first-hand journeymen as they themselves had in their loom-shops. These were their marginal land, in which their capital was not sunk; so the providence of the first-hand journeyman, which supplied him with looms and thus a means of independence in good times, turned to his disadvantage in bad, relative to the position of the loom-shop journeyman. The manufacturer turned him off, though anxious to keep him in reserve against the return of better days.

> Perhaps all the looms of a manufacturer are delayed in turns, on one ground or another assigned to the journeymen and undertakers, as that the warps are not ready, that the shute is not come, that there will be work for them next week, or that they must make that given to them last double time; by which means he keeps together his men and their looms.(1)

At the periphery of this cultivation system, both logically and topographically, were the single-hand looms of the northern parishes, where alone the old undertaking system survived, partly because the dispersion of the work-force and its ill-disciplined feckless nature made the supervision of the undertaker necessary. Here the feebly capitalised undertaker provided the most ancient and inefficient looms for a destitute proletarian work-force of totally unfortunate men, and many more women and children. They were the first to be laid off - because, one may judge, the inferiority

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(1) P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 54.

of their skills and their inability to bring community pressures to bear on the masters deprived them of the relative advantages possessed by the first-hand journeymen weavers of Coventry itself. Thus to the north the wives and children of bricklayers, colliers and farm labourers moved restlessly in and out of the single-hand trade, from ribbons to framework-knitting for the Leicestershire trade nearby, or to domestic service; 'but, so soon as trade improves, they too commonly disagree with their employers and return to the loom'. Fletcher wrote in 1838:

> The trade has constantly been ebbing and flowing; but for the last twenty years the slack times, at least in the single-hand trade, have preponderated over the brisk in the proportion of three to one, or at least five to two; and on these occasions besides the looms absolutely idle, as many more have often only half work.(1)

Bowring's diagnosis was all too correct. His remedy, however, the weavers were bound to reject, because whether or not their subjection to market forces would, as the political economists argued, mean greater prosperity for some future generation, for the present it offered only destitution: unending competition between weavers and the steady decline of earnings to below the subsistence level: the constant supplementation of these earnings from the poor rate and the consequent loss of human dignity and status and (in the city) the franchise forfeited by pauper freemen. Hence resulted the tenacious attempts by the weavers to maintain old methods of production and trade-regulation, or to erect new ones, which would sustain their earnings and control admissions to the industry. There was much that they could not attack: they could not move against the extension of the engine-loom in their own houses or against the employment of women on it - since this would have entailed an ant-like subjection to the general will that was quite beyond their powers. There was, however, relentless opposition, in places where human unity was possible and where pressure might conceivably succeed, against change which displaced labour or depreciated it. They supported the list of prices. They attempted to gain a statute forbidding the half-pay outdoor apprenticeship, common after the big purl time in the northern parishes outside the city, which depressed the earnings of adults. So, too, within the city the great majority of the first-hand journeymen preserved the customary system of domiciliary apprenticeship, which restricted the numbers of young people entering the trade because accommodation for

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(1) P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 35 et seq, 46 et seq, 54 et seq.

apprentices was necessarily limited. In 1838 (when a census was taken) the 1,556 first-hand journeymen had between them 358 indoor apprentices but only 96 outdoor (or 'half-pay') apprentices. There were in addition 103 outdoor apprentices indentured to the manufacturers who owned loom-shops (and who could not, of course, have indoor apprentices).(1)

The encouragement of outdoor apprenticeship by the loom-shops was one reason for their being disliked by weavers. There were many other reasons. Joseph Gutteridge, who about 1829 became a half-pay apprentice in John Dresser's loom-shop in St. Agnes Lane, recorded the dislike felt by many respectable artisans for the demoralising influences of the loom-shop.

> Factory life was very demoralising to youths with any pretensions to refinement. There was a custom in particular against which my whole nature revolted. Every newcomer was expected to pay for a gallon of ale, each of the other men in the factory adding a pint. The men would either strike or at any rate prevent the new hand from going on with his work until he had complied with this custom, so that it was morally impossible to resist. Sometimes the men would adjourn to a public-house to drink the beer, but oftener it would be brought into the shop. The older apprentices were allowed to share in these orgies, and the younger ones - lounging about - would get an odd drink now and then. These indulgences were the prelude in many instances to young men becoming habitual drunkards in after life ... The tyranny and persecution that the more thoughtful youths were subjected to can scarcely be realised by outsiders.(2)

Similarly, the Weavers' Committee attacked

> the feeling of good-fellowship leading to drinking, and absence from home, and its decencies. To escape being flouted, the man must take part in the habits of the mass among whom he is thrown, and in this mass the general level is low; while the weaver at home can pursue his own course, and has no restrictions on self-improvement. The factory system is the great propagator of 'socialism'. The men have no centre for their habits in a home, and in the power of forming an individual character.(3)

Precisely similar criticisms of the half-pay apprentice system were offered by masters, weavers, magistrates and the townspeople at large: that the young people were deprived of the upbringing traditionally given to the indoor apprentices and yet at the same time were improperly independent of their parents because they received wages.

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(1) P.P. [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 42 et seq. All 152 outdoor apprentice boys were on regular seven-year indentures and so were some of the 47 girls. The half pay given to the outdoor apprentice was in lieu of board in the master's house.

(2) Joseph Gutteridge, op. cit., p. 28.

(3) P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 73.

These criticisms were expressed so often, and by men who had no interest in revealing them - like the master who admitted that the moral influence of his shop was a bad one, especially upon the young unmarried men and women - that one must conclude that there was some truth in them. Yet there is danger in assuming that the ground of objection most frequently articulated was the one most intensely felt. As Fletcher pointed out with reference to the half-pay apprenticeship system, its demoralising tendency was 'of course, the ground most urged even by the parties more nearly interested'. (1) Underlying the weavers' concern at the immorality (in the conventional sense) of the loom-shop were other objections, both economic and moral, which were more crucial to their well-being than the annoyance of pot-house pleasures, but which were much less likely to attract the sympathy of decent, pious folk.

To the first-hand journeyman and his journeyman employees, it was a matter for hatred that the loom-shop occupied a privileged position in the productive system. In addition, proprietors of loom-shops were likely to contain within their ranks men wishing to thrust their system forward even more, since they preferred the profitability of a compact shop requiring the drudgery of daily management to the gentlemanly ease of the master who merely gave work out to first-hand journeymen and undertakers. And only the loom-shop gave full opportunity to the dynamic manufacturer eager to introduce more productive machinery or work rhythms unacceptable both to the outdoor weavers and those already in the loom-shops.

Such machinery would aggravate the existing surplus of labour, deprive the outdoor weavers of even more work, make it impossible for them to complete save on the degrading terms on which the single-hand weavers of north Warwickshire already competed with them, and end by driving them into the loom-shop. Here the first-hand journeyman would sink from being the proprietor of a small domestic workshop, with all that it meant in terms of dignity and independence, to the position of a factory hand.(2) The position of his journeyman might become less enviable too - leaving on one side the question which we cannot answer as to whether they preferred the domestic workroom to the larger loom-shop. For at the hands of an ambitious proprietor of a loom-shop they might quickly be subject, not to the

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(1) ibid., p. 45.

(2) P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 45 et seq, 72 et seq. Joseph Gutteridge, op. cit., pp. 26 et seq, 145.

attentions of the idle topers who so plagued the life of the young Gutteridge, but to the scrutiny of the foreman directed to impose factory discipline and more intensive rhythms of work in the interests of profit maximisation. Here there came together the interests of the first-hand journeymen, their journeymen, and the loom-shop hands themselves. Nobody loved the overlooker.

All the issues involved were brought sharply into focus by the story of John Day. He is the only man to whom one may point with certainty as an example in support of the oft-repeated statement that it was the small masters beginning from little who were the tyrants and anti-paternalists of the trade. About 1821 he was manufacturing in so small a way that he tended the shuttle himself, learning the art of 'shooting-down', or passing the shuttle between the warps. The other part of the weaver's craft was 'picking-up' - tending and cleaning the warps, a necessarily frequent operation with the delicate silk fibres. This Day could not learn, and so 'he employed a second hand at weekly wages to pick'. By 1826 he had ten looms and he turned all of them over to his separate picking-up system, which he found very advantageous and profitable, especially when both shooter-down and picker-up were paid by the week and not by the piece. The shooting-down was uninterrupted hard work and Day had this done by men; picking-up was light work performed by women and girls; 'and the advantage consists in the saving of the more valuable time of the man effected by the cheaper labour of the woman; their joint efforts turning off in a given time more work, as compared with the labour of a man only, than will pay for the labour of a woman'. Day said,

> Working the same hours as at my factory, weavers will make on the old system only one half the work they do on the separate picking-up system. Supposing the earnings or wages of the shooter-down to be the same on the new system as those of the weaver on the old, this gives in each week a second week's earnings for the picker-up; and supposing his hire to be half a weaver's wages, the advantages are one fourth, or 25 per cent, in the total cost of weaving, besides the interest of the capital saved in the employment of only one instead of two looms to do this amount of work.(1)

Day posed as a public philanthropist, kept less than the quarter increment for himself and paid more than the usual going rates to his weavers; his men got between 16s. and 24s. a week, his women between 10s. and 12s, and his apprentice boys 12s, at the depth of the slump of 1831; these were far higher rates than could currently

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(1) P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 49 et seq.

be earned by outworkers on piece-work. They were no help to Day, however, especially since the weavers knew that his own male outworkers in Bulkington and Foleshill, used as marginal labour to his Gosford Street loom-shop, were currently paid on piece-work very much less - at times as little as 4s. a week.

From the first Day met steady and malignant opposition from the entire weaving body. The men hated the division of labour. It diminished their craft and standing, turning 'the workman in the jacquard engine-loom from the rank of a somewhat skilled artisan, to that of little more than a mere automatic treader of one treadle, and passer of one set of shuttles'. It condemned them to day-long toil, by removing from their work the intermissions of picking-up. Weekly wages aggravated the evil, because they made it impossible for weavers to enjoy the freedom, conferred by piece-work on the outdoor weavers and loom-shop hands alike, to break off work when they wanted to. Above all, there was a general feeling among weavers that a new productive system which led to the making of more ribbons by fewer hands was evil, and that an effect of the superior competitive power it gave to Day would be 'a general introduction of the factory system of working on the master's premises as weekly wages, in lieu of being at home and paid by the piece'.(1)

Weavers were prevented from working for him by dislike of his methods and the pressure of the weavers at large - pressure whose nature is suggested by the visits of members of the Aggregate Committee to refractory weavers in the early 1820s. The hands that Day did obtain were not the best. He suffered constantly from their grumbling and disaffection. In the spring of 1829, when the slump and the conspicuous surplus of labour that resulted made his new methods seem all the more obnoxious, a determined campaign against him began. John Day and Sarah Day wrote to the Home Secretary about it in April 1830:

> your memorialists are absolutely fearful of their lives, as well as those of their children. The violence has been carried on now for twelve months, and it is not only against them and their family, but also against the persons in their employ; in the month of May last, a mob assembled in the street in which your memorialists reside, and waylaid their work-people, and so shamefully did they behave, that one of them, viz. Anna Maria Boydell ... that she never recovered, nor ever did a day's work after, but lingered in great pain and agony, till the 13th of November last, and then died, from the bruises she received;

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(1) P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 49 et seq, 231. Coventry Herald, 18 November, 25 November 1831.

> ... but this is not a tenth of the injuries your memorialists have been, and are subject to, - all manner of missiles and filth are constantly being dashed on and against their premises; but this your memorialists would not have noticed, had it not been for a more diabolical act committed on Thursday night last, ... a train of gunpowder laid in an alcove situate in your memorialists' garden, behind their house, and which was set fire to, about 9 o'clock - the concussion did infinite damage to the said alcove, and absolutely shook the foundations of the buildings in the surrounding neighbourhood!!!(1)

John Hall faced similar intransigence. He was a throwster and silk-ribbon manufacturer from Coggeshall in Essex, who also had a loom-shop in Coventry in the 1820s. In Essex he made ribbons on improved versions of a rack and bar loom which had been invented by a man in St. Etienne in 1825. They were expensive and required a great deal of capital - but they made much better black ribbons on half the quantity of labour used by the engine loom. Hall dared not introduce them into Coventry, however, because he feared that they would be broken up by the weavers, and that he would be insulted. As it was, the manager of his Coventry loom-shop was plagued by the bloody-mindedness of the weavers, and on one occasion, about 1830, his partner had to leave Coventry in the middle of the night a few hours after getting there since he was afraid of what might happen to him if he stayed. Hall found the Essex weavers more tractable but less expert; his ribbons, he thought, would be improved yet again if he succeeded in getting his rack looms into Coventry and the best hands of the city 'working cordially with him'; he would then 'defy the world' with his ribbons. But he could not, and so he disposed of his Coventry loom-shop. He was the victim, he thought, of 'a combination', which 'would rather keep those men out of employ, to keep up their bad machinery, than suffer them to work for me'.(2)

What is startling in the 1820s is the way in which different sub-groups in the weaving body were not willing to place their own interests above those of the others. The single-hand weavers might have been expected to unite against the competition of the engine-loom, the outdoor weavers against the loom-shop operatives, and the ordinary outdoor journeyman against the first-hand journeymen, and men against women. This last had indeed been characteristic of the trade before the big purl time, when barring women from the shuttle had been a guard upon the list of prices. But a generation

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(1) P.R.O.: H.O. 40/25, John Day and Sarah Day to Sir Robert Peel, 28 April 1830. See also P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 49 et seq.

(2) P.P.: H.C. 678 (1831-32) xix, pp. 372 et seq.

later there were few signs of such primitive jealousies. There was the benighted single-hand undertaker of Nuneaton, who suggested to Fletcher in 1838 that engine-looms should be taxed; but Fletcher himself said that no other similar proposals were made to him and he gave no other instances of the jealousy of the engine weaver that he said existed. There was the original jealousy of the several hundred Irish weavers who settled in Coventry when the Dublin trade succumbed to English competition about 1826, and which was perhaps responsible, with simple Protestant feeling, for the hooting and stoning that Roman Catholics were subjected to in the early 1830s when they worshipped at their chapel in Hill Street. But this feeling was soon forgotten, and never erupted into real violence.(1) No other incidents are recorded that show division between the weavers.

One reason for this was that weavers of different types lived mingled together in the same area. This occurred in each of the ten ancient wards of the city. Thus in 1838 there lived in Jordan Well ward (which was merely several hundred yards across) 333 first-hand loom owners - journeymen and journeywomen - 113 journeymen and 46 journeywomen who worked for the first hands, and 18 male and 11 female factory hands.(2) There was a parallel, though certainly less dense, meshing of different groups in the northern parishes. Though by 1838 single-hand weavers scarcely existed in the city and were confined to the northern districts, from Foleshill to Watling Street, these areas also contained many Jacquard looms and there were in addition loom-shops.(3) Thus nowhere were the different functional categories distributed in mutually exclusive topographical blocks: and this helped to prevent divisions between one group of weavers and another. What must have been only too apparent to most weavers was that bitter divisions between them would sunder local communities, and would in any case be far more likely, in view of the plethora of weavers' interest-groups, to benefit the masters rather than the category to which any particular weaver felt attached. Thus, paradoxically, one contributory cause of the unity was the fragmentation of the industry's structure that resulted from the changes after 1813.

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(1) Dom Sebastian Simpson, A Centenary Memorial of St. Osburg's, Coventry, 1845-1945 (Coventry, 1945), p. 15. P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 53, 55.

(2) P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 42, 43, tables vii and viii. The Census Enumerators' Books for the 1841 and 1851 censuses, which it had been hoped would demonstrate this mingling in a concrete way, do not do so; the enumerators classified most weavers as 'ribbon weavers' merely.

(3) P.P. [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 12, 48 et seq.

So a common factor in the weavers' opposition to Day and Hall is a general comprehension that their common subjection to the power and wishes of capital transcended the interests which on a low or short-term view might seem to separate them. It was this wide understanding of the need for and value of unity which led the weavers of the entire north Warwickshire area to agree in November 1829 on close cooperation in future: which led the whole body of weavers to fight together during these years for lists of prices for all weavers: which led Edward Goode (one of the weavers' leaders) to argue in 1832 against the latest form of the loom shop - the steam factory - in terms of its effects upon the weavers as a whole - indeed the community as a whole. Steam power would lead to more unemployment and the immiseration of those at work: 'the pauperising effects of steam power, as applied to manufactures, ... may be seen at Manchester and other places'. To the steam-power capitalist Goode would say, 'Cursed is he that oppresseth the poor'.(1)

Feelings of humanity and a self-interested concern to prevent the vast destitution and high poor rates that market wages would bring led to wide support in the town for the list of prices, and thus also for the weavers' fight against those changes which displaced labour. This was indicated by the public backing for the campaign for the extension of the Spitalfields Acts and by the general sympathy for the weavers who carried their opposition to steam factories so far as to burn down the only one in the town in November 1831.(2) But though in this instance the sympathy of the public overcame its dislike of outrageous violence, it could not approve it. The weavers thus had several reasons for rejecting violence. Continued support for them in the town and amongst the honourable masters moderated their actions by helping them to see industrial paternalism not as the declining and anachronistic force it really was - especially in a national context - but as a vital power which might yet prevail: their frequent, time-consuming, and expensive prosecutions of their cause in Parliament showed their pathetic failure to grasp how frail their voices were outside the city walls. The civic backing for them slaked their anger at the thrusting masters, and more importantly, made it expedient for them to conceal it: to use (at least in public) only those methods, like

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(1) Coventry Observer, 15 October, 12 November 1829. Coventry Herald, 4 May 1832.

(2) See Chapter Three.

donkeying, which would not antagonise too much the corporation, the citizens and the honourable masters. Anything more was promptly disavowed by the weavers' leaders, just as they condemned the mill-burning of November 1831. In any case, little violence was commonly needed to achieve the weavers' ends. John Hall's partner was not harmed, but he left the city quickly, which was what the weavers wanted. John Hall's machines were not broken; the vague threat to do so was sufficient to prevent his bringing them in. John Day had by 1830 no imitators in his plan of separate picking-up and payment by the week. After his mill was burnt in 1831 Beck said that he would 'sacrifice his private views to that of the general voice'; he would not apply steam power in Coventry.(1)

The weavers' abrasive opposition to technical changes that displaced labour reinforced the revulsion against uncomfortable changes that many masters already felt. This was the legacy of the way of life natural to the Coventry merchant capitalist in the days of prohibition, with its reservation to the city of the legal monopoly of the British market: managers gave out the silk, and undertakers and first-hand journeymen superintended the production of ribbons and risked their fixed capital because they owned the looms. Charles Bray, with his devotion to radical politics and every new intellectual fashion from Owenism onwards, his editing a newspaper and writing books, as the profits of his ribbon business steadily declined into the 1850s, was the most spectacular example of the way in which the routine toil of the counting-house made little appeal even to an energetic ribbon manufacturer. Other ribbon masters confessed to a dislike of loom-shops because they presented them with a challenge of superior competitiveness which they could only meet by undertaking the distasteful work of detailed factory management themselves. Similarly, many failed to break free from the toils of the 'slaughterhouse' wholesalers and set up direct links with retailers though the profitability of doing so was made clear to them.(2) The honourable masters' support for the list of prices sprang from their wish to minimise competition between them, as well as from the desire to benefit the weavers.(3)

The masters were unwilling to support Day and Hall or to imitate their techniques. The application of steam power to the

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(1) P.P.: H.C. 678 (1831-32) xix, p. 59; [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p.50. Coventry Herald, 2 December 1831.

(2) Charles Bray, Phases of Opinion, pp. 20 et seq. P.P.: H.C. 678 (1831-32) xix, pp. 271, 377; [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 47.

(3) P.P.: H.C. 678 (1831-32) xix, pp. 78, 107.

production of silk ribbons was admittedly a problem, especially for fancy ribbons. But manufacturers elsewhere had been using power looms to make narrow plain ribbons, especially black ribbons, since about 1810; by 1831 John Hall was doing so in Coggeshall and he believed that the technical problems could be solved and that fancy ribbons could be woven by steam - as of course they were. The Coventry masters emphasised the problems in the way of the manufacture of fancy ribbons by steam and did not believe that they could be overcome; for many years they did not attempt to make even plain ribbons by steam. Beck was the first to try: it is not surprising that for some years afterwards his only imitator was the courageous John Day. The Coventry Herald's fear that force or 'obloquy' would prevent the application of steam to the ribbon weaving in the city proved correct.(1)

'Has not every innovation and improvement in Coventry been a matter of some difficulty?' a hostile questioner asked William Brunskill, (a manufacturer and loom-shop owner) at a session of the Select Committee on the Silk Trade in 1832. 'Yes, I dare say it has; the weavers have got a very good living generally, and have been in a certain degree uncontrollable.' Brunskill's answer needs qualification: it was because the masters had had a good living, and the weavers feared a bad one, that they were uncontrollable.(2)

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(1) Coventry Herald, 13 April, 18 May, 25 May 1832. P.P.: H.C. 678 (1831-32) xix, pp. 85, 108, 377 et seq, 418, 796; [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 51 et seq.

(2) P.P.: H.C. 678 (1831-32) xix, p. 25.

CHAPTER THREE

REFORM BILL AND RIOT, 1830-1832

I

The Foundation of the Coventry Political Union

It seems clear that before the 1830 election Ellice and Fyler, his old enemy, compromised to avoid a conflict. Peter Moore was dead and Heathcote, Fyler's original colleague and during 1826 usually regarded as the abler man, was no longer in the running. For some time he had rarely attended the House of Commons; early in March the Coventry Observer addressed him ironically, asking him to forgive the intrusion into his retirement, but would he please vacate his seat and let an industrious man take his place? In April the Blue Club addressed him in the same way; Heathcote refused, claiming the right to decide when his attendance in the House of Commons 'may be most likely to promote the interests of my constituents or the public'.(1) He decided not to stand again in the election of July 1830. Ellice announced that he would stand again early in July and expressed the hope that past differences would not be referred to; he would not be connected with any other candidate. The Blue Club had already declared that they would support no second candidate. At his first meeting at the Craven Arms Ellice asked for one vote only - but said that he would not join with anyone opposing Fyler. He asked too for no rallying and no violence. Ellice later repeated that he would join no compact

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(1) Coventry Herald, 9 April 1830. Coventry Observer, 25 February, 11 March 1830. The Blue Club had been founded soon after the 1826 election to advance the liberal cause. The Coventry Observer was particularly associated with it. See Chapter Four, section I for the Blue Club.

with or against any other candidate.(1) At the end of July Ellice tried to make his exact position clear at another meeting at the Craven Arms. He would do nothing either to discourage or to encourage anyone to oppose Fyler. If a third candidate stood he would not oppose him were he independent: if he supported Fyler he would oppose him. 'If the other party brought a third man, he had a fourth in his pocket.' An equally pointed request to others to keep off was directed by Ellice's agents, Troughton and Lea, to Attwood the radical Birmingham banker, when it was rumoured that he was going to stand, his expenses to be largely paid for by Sir Francis Burdett. Ellice, they said, would support no other candidate unless the Tories brought one forward, in which case Ellice and his friends would consider themselves free from the pledges they had made and would back a fourth.(2) The Tories gave no sign of introducing a colleague for Fyler. It is hard to define Fyler's position politically. He had been brought forward by Tories in 1826 and was commonly regarded as one. His brief speeches at the hustings seem to have neither confirmed nor refuted this attribution. He had voted against Catholic Emancipation in 1829 and early in 1830 the blues, while grudgingly praising his industry as an M.P., denounced him as an Ultra Tory and a high churchman. Yet this description scarcely fitted his attitude in 1830. He had voted for Lord John Russell's motion to enfranchise large cities, and during the election he made much of his desire to repeal the Corn Laws and effect radical reductions in taxation and expenditure. He was also against free trade in ribbons, a conviction he shared with men of all shades of political opinion in Coventry.(3)

For some weeks Ellice and Fyler performed a weird electoral dance - neither praising nor insulting each other, and moving through all the ritual of a campaign in case a third candidate (who would make a poll necessary) turned up. Despite Ellice's denials, it seems very likely that the two men had agreed to compromise the election. This would not, however, please all the voters: some freemen wanted a third candidate because they wanted to be bribed. At the last moment one appeared - Richard Spooner, Attwood's partner who was nominated by William Browett, the dark blue draper, and

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(1) Coventry Herald, 2 July, 9 July, 16 July, 30 July 1830. C.W.C Broadsides Collection, To the Independent Freemen of the City of Coventry, 2 July 1830 (address of Edward Ellice).
(2) Coventry Herald, 30 July 1830. Gough Add. Warwickshire b.2, T.B. Troughton and H.C. Lea, To the Independent Freemen of the City of Coventry, July 1830.
(3) Coventry Observer, 9 April 1829, 25 February, 4 March 1830. Coventry Herald, 16 July, 23 July 1830.

William Sawbridge, a ribbon manufacturer.(1) At the poll Fyler received 451 votes, Ellice 422, and Spooner 4.(2) The election was a very quiet one. The poll booth at Cross Cheaping was much larger than the cramped affair that had made crushing so easy in 1826. The corporation did not interfere and Alderman Morris - a new corporator - warned that violence would be punished. Ellice tried hard to prevent any recurrence of the hostility of 1826; sure of the votes of the liberal ribbon-masters, he sought the weaver votes actively, boasting that he had accepted a request to stand from 600 freemen and strongly repudiating the charge that he favoured the masters against the men. But some of the dislike for him that many weavers had shown in 1826 survived. The freemen who were enemies of Ellice and friends of Fyler met in the Golden Horse with William Angliss in the chair, and David Smith, T. Goode, and Johnson (all weavers) leading speakers for him; Johnson brought up the old argument that Ellice had gained thousands of pounds for the masters in drawbacks while the weavers took a wage-cut.(3) The Herald argued that Ellice's opponents were from two naturally contradictory groups, the rich and the poor, the latter including some radicals and some dissenters. 'He is the very man the poor would prefer as a Representative, had he another name, and were he deserted by his present friends. The poor and rich of his opponents have no opinions in common; they are as opposite as extremes can be.'(4) The Herald itself said that this hostility to Ellice among the poor was declining; certainly it counted for less in 1830 than in 1826. No doubt, too, the Herald was in a sense right in regarding the alliance as irrational: but it stands in no more need of explanation than the return of Ellice, a moderate liberal, at every election from 1830 onwards by a popular constituency.

The 1830 election fails to reflect the current agitation in Coventry for both parliamentary reform and higher wages, demands that were presented by the same people. From the start of the slump which the ribbon trade was still suffering in 1830, the attitude of the weavers had been that the underlying cause of their distress was

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(1) Coventry Herald, 30 July 1830. West, op. cit., p. 778.

(2) T.W. Whitley, op. cit., p. 285.

(3) Coventry Herald, 2 July, 9 July, 16 July, 30 July 1830. See also Gough Add. Warwickshire b.2, 'A Weaver', To the Independent Freemen of Coventry, 5 July 1830, and 'A Poor Weaver', To the Ribbon Weavers, 20 July 1830 - both repeating the charges of 1826 that Ellice was the masters' friend: and the reply by Benjamin Poole to the 'calumnies' of 1826, To the Ribbon Weavers of Coventry, 13 July 1830.

(4) Coventry Herald, 30 July 1830.

French competition: in this they were at one with their masters though they were in conflict with them over the extent to which the weavers should bear the consequences of it in a reduction of their earnings. The weavers often protested against free trade in ribbons and petitioned the Board of Trade and the House of Commons for the restoration of prohibition. Weavers like Edward Goode, William Fletcher and Benjamin Poole were leading figures in this campaign. The cause was taken up in Parliament by Fyler and others with a demand for a select committee on the silk trade, without effect.(1) But early in 1830 there was a significant change of emphasis in the policy advocated by some weavers as a means of removing distress. While in no way retreating from their enmity to free trade, they began to stress that the fundamental cause of their troubles was Britain's political structure. This new move was a symptom of the increased enthusiasm for parliamentary reform that began in 1830.

Early in 1830, as the number of paupers in Coventry was steadily growing, Benjamin Poole moved towards radical reform as a means of removing the underlying causes of distress: he argued for parliamentary reform, a great reduction in taxation, and Cobbett's policy of 'equitable adjustment' of debt now that the currency had been deflated.(2) A few weeks later a meeting, said to consist very largely of weavers, was held in the Golden Horse to consider the causes of distress. 250 were present. The chair was taken by Stephen Stanley, a ribbon manufacturer; speakers included James Grant, a Broadgate chemist and one of Cobbett's chief supporters in the 1820 election who was to retire in January 1831 after nearly fifty years in business, T. Goode - a Fyler supporter in the 1830 election - and Benjamin Poole, who attacked the 'useless standing army'. The meeting decided to requisition the Mayor for a public meeting to consider the causes of distress. When the magistrates refused an official meeting one was held in the Golden Horse instead. The speakers included, besides those at the earlier gathering, T. Atkins, James Adams (probably a ribbon weaver), James Sibley Whittem, a currier, William Fletcher, the secretary of the weavers' committee, and at least two men who were soon to support Fyler - Steane and Newsome. The arguments of the last two

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(1) See Chapter Two, section VI for this campaign.

(2) Coventry Observer, 28 January 1830. For the growing burden of poverty at this time, see Chapter Two, section V.

prove the Herald's claim that some of those who supported Fyler were radicals: all speakers argued that the causes of distress were fundamentally political, and a petition to the House of Commons called for parliamentary reform, a reduction in the size of the standing army and in exorbitant salaries, reform of the Church of England and increased stipends for poor clergymen, and a cut in national expenditure to one-third of its current level. At Poole's suggestion a provisional committee was set up to formulate rules for a political union, apparently on the model of the Birmingham Political Union founded a short time before.(1)

The Coventry Political Union was formed a few weeks later; it was open to all who paid subscriptions of at least 1d. a week, was to meet every month for readings and the discussion of political questions, and was to have as its objects parliamentary reform, the redistribution of taxes from poor to rich, and the abolition of tithes. Its committee or 'political council' of eighteen members was to meet weekly. Soon afterwards, when 150 had already joined, the subscription was lowered to ¼d. a week so that the poorest might join. At the meeting in September 1830 300 were present. The members who are named in the press include, from those who had attended the distress meetings, Benjamin Poole, Stephen Stanley, T. Goode, James Grant, Thomas Newsome, William Fletcher and J.S. Whittem.(2) Other known members were David Smith (a weaver and yet another Fyler supporter), the weavers James Perkins and Edward Goode (T. Goode's brother), William Taunton, for many years to be one of the city's leading radicals, Samuel Hennell, a ribbon manufacturer, Benjamin Eaton, the secretary, W. Hickling, a printer and the proprietor of a circulating library in Earl Street who succeeded Eaton as secretary in 1831, John Royle, a solicitor, Thomas Watson Gill, a hatter, William Mayo, a watch-maker, and Richard Marriott, a solicitor who acted for Alexander Somerville during the court of enquiry into his court martial in 1832. A.F. Gregory, the liberal gentleman of Stivichall Hall, was invited to become chairman in November 1831; his reply is not recorded but in June 1832 he did take the chair at the dinner of

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(1) Coventry Observer, 11 February, 25 February 1830. Coventry Herald, 4 June 1830, 21 January 1831. West, op. cit., pp. 772 et seq.

(2) Coventry Observer, 11 March, 25 March 1830. Coventry Herald, 16 April, 7 May, 10 September 1830.

the union.(1) Press records of the meetings of the union seem to reveal that a broad social spectrum was represented in it, but fail to name members who did not speak and thus tend, most probably, to over-estimate the proportion of middle-class members. Hickling declared in September 1830 that the union consisted predominantly of poor men, who met together for 'mutual instruction'. 'The time was arrived when the people saw that it was only through their own ignorance of the political state of the country, that these aristocrats were enabled to uphold their dominion over the wealth of the nation.'(2) Early in 1831 the union set up a reading room and library, presumably to further its educational aims. If more than one person wished to read a newspaper it was to be read aloud, during which time there was to be silence in the room. Only forty-eight members became subscribers to the news room, perhaps because the new scales of subscription then adopted deterred the poor from making full use of a facility which obviously would be of greater value to them than to other members. 1d. a month entitled members to attend the monthly meetings; 1d. a week entitled them to attend weekly meetings and to make partial use of the reading room; full use was confined to those who paid 2d. a week.(3)

At their monthly discussions the members of the union declared themselves to be against the corn laws, tithes, the continuance of the East India Company's charter, the newspaper stamp duty and high advertisement duties.(4) But a main focus of the union's discussions was the need for parliamentary reform. From the first the members of the union seemed willing to accept a moderate degree of reform and unwilling to contemplate the use of any methods but peaceful ones to achieve reform. In April 1830 the union approved the Marquis of Blandford's bill: Edward Burdett, as an old radical, thought it did not go far enough, and Poole agreed; he wanted universal suffrage and the ballot, but he seems to have voiced the feelings of the meeting when he declared his willingness to accept

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(1) Coventry Observer, 25 March 1830. Coventry Herald, 4 June, 9 July, 10 September 1830, 26 August, 23 September, 4 November, 25 November 1831, 11 May, 29 June 1832. Alexander Somerville, The Autobiography of a Working Man, by 'One who has Whistled at the Plough' (London, 1848), pp. 310 et seq. West, op. cit., pp. 771 et seq. C.R.O.: Misc. Letters, Thomas Gill to the Secretary of Leamington Political Union, 20 June 1832.

(2) Coventry Herald, 17 September 1830.

(3) ibid., 7 January, 28 January 1831.

(4) Coventry Herald, 16 April, 7 May, 4 June, 31 December 1830, 26 August 1831, 9 March 1832. Poor Man's Guardian, 24 March 1832. C.R.O.: Misc. Letters, Henry L. Bulwer to W. Hickling, 27 January 1832, 27 March 1832.

it as a partial measure. In July George Edmonds, the Birmingham radical, took the chair at another meeting to discuss parliamentary reform. Edward Burdett and Samuel Burdett argued that the union should press for annual parliaments, universal suffrage and the ballot. Edmonds and Hickling argued that the best hope for reform was in a union of the middle and working classes for moderate changes and that the Burdetts' demands could only be achieved by a revolution. Edward Burdett disagreed: 'I have a large family, and to suppose me friendly to a revolution, would be to say that I had no affection for them. I am not a Revolutionist.' But the motion for moderate reform was carried.(1)

The French Revolution of August 1830 had a perceptibly heightening effect on the rhetoric of the union's members: 'their bright example will spread far and wide ... one tyrant has fallen - others are trembling'.(2) At the September meeting several members wore tri-coloured ribbons and James Grant announced that 'the example set in France, must have some effect in promoting a Reform in this country'; Thomas Goode wished 'every one now to come forward and assist in the great work of Parliamentary Reform, as that was the only thing that would redress the wrongs of the people of England'.(3) A fund was opened by the union for those wounded in the Paris fighting. James Grant took the money to Paris as the union's delegate; he was entertained by Lafayette whom he enrolled as a member of the Birmingham Political Union.(4) In the new year Henry Hunt visited Coventry on his way from Preston to London. He was escorted from the toll-bar on the Allesley New Road by a procession of union members carrying a green and crimson flag that bore the legend 'Hunt and Reform'. Hunt made his speech from James Grant's house in Broadgate where Cobbett had stayed in 1820. He reminded the freemen of Coventry of their duty not to sell their franchise; the electors of Preston did not. 'This morning I met a gentleman on the road who informed me that any man might get in for Coventry if he would spend but £200 on ale.' Perhaps the stories were false? 'No, it's true', shouted voices in the crowd.(5) Hunt moved on, at his meeting, to disparage Fyler

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(1) Coventry Herald, 9 April, 9 July 1830.
(2) ibid., 3 September 1830.
(3) Coventry Herald, 10 September 1830.
(4) ibid., 17 September, 17 December 1830.
(5) ibid., 14 January 1831.

and Ellice and to call for radical reform. When he asked for support, all his hearers raised their hands for the ballot. A few months later, resolutions for manhood suffrage and the ballot were carried at a meeting of the C.P.U. addressed by Henry Hetherington.(1)

The evidence suggests that in their growing enthusiasm for reform members of the union raised their demands, but that their loyalty to the Whig government remained. Benjamin Poole was quite satisfied, apparently, with the Whig government early in 1831: he reproved those who failed to see the difficulties that Earl Grey faced, and expounded the necessity of gradualism.(2) He made no demands for radical reform. Poole's later career in the 1830s, 40s, and 50s shows him to be steadily moving away from a radical position; he may have been unrepresentatively moderate in 1831. The evidence suggests, however, that even those who were prepared to articulate demands for reform far more radical than his were unprepared really to rock the Whig boat. At the end of 1830 another reformist society, the 'Friends of the People' was founded in Coventry, 'for the diffusion of political information on the principles of Radical reform'.(3) Its intention was to circulate handbills and pamphlets and its weekly subscription was ¼d. so that all might join. Of the thirty who joined in the first few months some were also members of the political union - for example, William Taunton, J.S. Whittem and Thomas Goode. The society seemed to speak especially for the dissenting interest; there was at least one discussion on the grasping clergy of the Church of England. Members were particularly enthusiastic for the ballot; its committee was chosen by ballot to show its value in parliamentary elections.(4) Shortly before the election of 1831 the Friends of the People issued a handbill that might seem to confirm that they were radicals of the NUWC stamp. Their call for parliamentary reform was couched in apocalyptic language and stressed the need for parliamentary reform as a 'knife and fork' question. After attacking the borough-mongers it proceeded: 'Almighty God! What rights have the poor of this realm ever enjoyed beneath their iron

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(1) Coventry Herald, 14 January, 29 July 1831.
(2) ibid., 18 February, 4 March, 26 August 1831.
(3) ibid., 26 November 1830.
(4) ibid., 3 December, 1830, 21 January, 18 February 1831.

tyranny and plundering away? unless it be the right of starvation, the right of incessant trial and labour, of hourly anxiety, withering poverty, and actual want.' Its conclusion was an anti-climax - a call for support for Ellice and Fyler if both were in favour of the Whig bill.(1)

At the 1831 election reform was the overriding issue. Ellice was wholeheartedly committed to the Whig bill; indeed, as Secretary to the Treasury and whip he was helping to steer it through the Commons, and according to John Campbell 'he had more to do with carrying the bill than any other man'.(2) Fyler's position was more ambiguous. He had already announced that he was a 'sincere, but moderate reformer',(3) and though he had voted for the second reading he refused to give explicit assurances, when asked for them by Richard Marriott, that he would support the bill in its entirety; he was suspected of wishing to alter it in committee. Equivocation would not satisfy. Early in the election campaign Fyler's friends rallied the town with tricolour flags and both light and dark blue ribbons, 'symbolic of the desired union of all parties',(4) and he continued rather plaintively to complain that he was a reformer and that he had been misrepresented. The dark blues would not support him as he wanted, and Fyler's most prominent supporters were the Tories of 1826 like Captain Bunney and Weare, though the corporation did not this time interfere in the election. Thomas Banbury, a dark blue leader, went to London, saw Henry Lytton Bulwer, the younger brother of the prolific novelist, and persuaded him to stand with Ellice. Ellice, busy in London with the details of the national campaign, could not come to his constituency until shortly before the poll, and left the task of electioneering in it to his brother, Captain Ellice, R.N. The latter's arrival in Coventry with Bulwer was adroitly organised by the dark blue ward managers, whose names are not recorded but whose function in a large, popular and malleable constituency was plainly important. The dark blue freemen were assembled in their wards; they rallied the town with flags and music; they marched to the London Road and escorted the campaigners' carriage back to the city, carrying banners inscribed

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(1) Coventry Herald, 29 April 1831.

(2) quoted in Dictionary of National Biography, vi (London, 1908), p. 664.

(3) Coventry Herald, 11 March 1831.

(4) Coventry Herald, 29 April 1831.

'Bulwer and the People', 'King William and Reform', and 'The Bill, the Whole Bill, and nothing but the Bill'. When Edward Ellice arrived he and Bulwer spoke and campaigned together. The Coventry Herald described the election as peaceful: but this reflects the Victorian press's habit of ignoring embarrassing facts, since Osmond the sheriff, Guest the assessor, and Dewes the under-sheriff were set upon and beaten by a dark blue mob when attempting to clear a way to the polling booth - an incident described by a Warwick newspaper as an outrage even by the standards set by Coventry elections. Ellice and Bulwer were returned with 1663 and 1564 votes respectively, against Fyler's 1151.(1) Afterwards the victors were carried round the town on chairs covered with dark blue satin and surmounted with a canopy of dark blue silk, supported on lofty fluted pillars and decorated with a gold fringe and tassels and a gilt ball bearing a laurel. All this may have kept Ellice and Bulwer dry but their supporters were drenched in a torrential thunderstorm.(2)

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(1) For the election, see Coventry Herald, 1 April, 29 April, 6 May, 13 May 1831. Warwick and Warwickshire General Advertiser, 14 May 1831. C.W.C.: Broadsides Collection, Edward Ellice, To the Worthy and Independent Freemen of the City of Coventry, 23 April 1831, R. Marriott, To the Freemen of the City of Coventry, 27 April 1831 (recounting Fyler's refusal to answer Marriott's questions), 'A Freeman', Mr Fyler and Mr Bulwer, 1 May 1831, and H.L. Bulwer, To the Worthy and Independent Freemen of the City of Coventry, 27 April 1831. Fyler's protestations that he was a reformer are in Gough Add. Warwickshire b.2 and are dated 21 and 25 April 1831. See also C.R.O.: Doggett Collection, letters of John Carter, Richard Dewes to Carter, 27 April 1831, and 6 May 1831, on the corporation's refusal to interfere in the election. See also T.W. Whitley, op. cit., p. 289.

(2) Coventry Herald, 6 May 1831. C.W.C.: Broadsides Collection: Chairing of Ellice and Bulwer, 5 May 1831.

II

The Freeman Franchise

A surprising omission from the 1831 campaign in Coventry was any discussion, apparently, of the question of the freeman franchise. Much of the support that the reform bill attracted from radicals has been explained by reference to its far-reaching nature; it went further than many had expected and certainly further than the Tories were prepared to concede. But in its first form the bill threatened to disfranchise all Coventry men admitted to the freedom in future, including apprentices who had already signed indentures in the expectation of becoming electors. Existing freemen were to keep their votes for their lifetime, provided that they lived in or near the borough; non-resident freemen were to be disfranchised.(1) All borough electorates were of course to share Coventry's fate: the Whig government was adamant that the ancient borough franchises should be swept away and replaced by the £10 valuation franchise, so that (in T.B. Macaulay's words) 'the right of suffrage should depend upon a pecuniary qualification'.(2) In introducing the government's proposals Russell said: 'I contend that it is important ... to give to the real property and to the real respectability of the different cities and towns the right of voting'. The ancient-right voters were frequently from the lowest class and therefore corrupt; they added in effect to the expense of elections which it was one of the government's aims to reduce. Especially was this true of the non-resident voters.(3) One cause of expense, said Althorp, was that 'a great part of the voters were persons of

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(1) Coventry Herald, 4 March 1831.

(2) Parliamentary Debates, third series, ii, p. 1192.

(3) ibid., ii, pp. 1061 et seq.

little or no property, and were therefore liable to be corrupted!.(1) Palmerston thought that the bill would redress the imbalance between middle-class and lower-class elements in the electorate and remedy the 'gross and barefaced corruption which prevailed among the lower classes, when their votes became necessary to the higher'.(2) No Whig supported the ancient franchises in the debate on the first reading in the House of Commons. The need to reduce the expense of elections was the reason advanced for their abolition by government speakers and their supporters. But several critics of the government pointed out that a remedy for venality could be sought elsewhere than in disfranchisement: and indeed the Whigs made clear, of course, their dislike of a democratic electorate.(3)

Henry Hunt, the radical member for Preston, argued for an extension of the suffrage to all men who paid taxes, a group which would have included the ancient-right electors under another head:(4) in effect, Hunt thus defended on quasi-democratic grounds their franchise, though not their peculiar privileges. It was these, however, which brought to the ancient-right electors their most articulate and (in the end) most influential support: from some Tories who abominated both radical faith in the working class and Whiggish trust in the middle. These Tories offered no defence of mere unsophisticated, uncontrolled popular right: instead of the dangerously novel and levelling representative systems which would be the ineluctable result of their rivals' political philosophies they predicated another - the maintenance both of a limited, measured element of popular representation, to provide a safe mode of access to Parliament for a small number of spokesmen for working-class interests, and of all those ancient, established, constitutional privileges which rich and poor, high and low, might share: since if the privileges of the poor were ruthlessly truncated, the far more significant and valuable privileges of the rich that were intertwined with them would, at no distant time, disappear too. Robert Peel said in the debate on the first reading:

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(1) ibid., ii, p. 1140.

(2) ibid., ii, pp. 1318 et seq.

(3) Norman Gash, Politics in the Age of Peel (London, 1953), p. 17.

(4) Parliamentary Debates, third series, ii, pp. 1208 et seq.

> I think it a fatal objection that every link between the representative and the constituent body should be separated, so far as regards the lower classes. It is an immense advantage that there is at present no class of people, however humble, which is not entitled to a voice in the election of representatives ... I think it an immense advantage that the class which includes the weavers of Coventry and the potwallopers of Preston has a share in the privileges of the present system. The individual right is limited, and properly limited, within narrow bounds; but the class is represented. It has its champion within your walls, the organ of its feeling, and the guardian of its interests.(1)

Peel made clear his opposition to any extension of the present amount of popular representation. His advocacy of a narrow and condescending paternalism was informed at least as much by fear of the consequences of abrogating privilege as by sympathy for the poor. He voiced his apprehensions a few months later during the debate at the committee stage of the second version of the bill:

> He was not for an indiscriminate admission of any class of voters, but he was for the maintenance of existing hereditary privileges, particularly when those privileges were possessed by the humbler classes of society. We had an hereditary Monarchy, an hereditary Aristocracy, and hereditary rights to property. We defended all these with the utmost pertinacity, but we had no scruple in confiscating the hereditary privileges of freemen. Beware of the precedent you are establishing. You cannot forfeit one class of hereditary privilege, though it be the humblest, without shaking the foundation of all.(2)

In the debate on the first reading it seemed to Richard Hart Davis, Tory member for the freeman borough of Bristol, that the most pressing injustice was that those who had properly expected soon to become freemen electors through servitude, inheritance or marriage would not be enfranchised:

> the chartered rights of ages were to be swept away in a moment. The rich and the poor had an equal right to complain: every apprentice whose time of service had not expired, every freeman's son not yet of age, every freeman's daughter not yet married, were deprived of their legal and just rights.(3)

In Coventry the abrogation of the inchoate rights of existing apprentices led 1,600 masters and apprentices to sign a petition that their rights might be protected. This was presented by Ellice at the same time as another petition from 5,000 Coventry reformers in support of the government bill. As a leading Whig Ellice made the most of the lack of support for Peel's arguments in a city which might have been expected to agree with him, on selfish grounds:

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(1) ibid., ii, pp. 1330 et seq.
(2) ibid., vi, pp. 893 et seq.
(3) ibid., ii, pp. 1302 et seq.

> Some allusion having been made as to the effect of the proposed measure on the weavers and operatives of Coventry and Preston, as soon as the report of what had been said on that subject arrived in Coventry, a hand-bill was distributed, stating the fact, and within five or six hours, the petition he held in his hand was signed by them. He understood that no freeman in the City of Coventry refused to sign his name to the petition ... He was bound, however, to state that he had also another Petition to present, signed by Masters and Apprentices in Coventry, praying that their rights might be protected. With that exception, he believed there was no feeling against any part of the Bill, throughout the city of Coventry.(1)

It was left to Fyler to argue for the continuance of the freeman franchise, on the grounds that the very willingness of Coventrians to sacrifice it showed their fitness to have it. And he advanced for popular representation more generous reasons than Peel's:

> He was a moderate Reformer, and could not think the democratic influence would acquire too much sway as long as one-fourth of the county Members in that house, were, as at present, the sons and brothers of Peers. He was apprehensive that, if the proposed measure passed in its present form, the landed interest would have more power than it now had.(2)

Fyler's support for the freeman franchise helps one to understand why in Coventry there was continued support for him among working-class voters, and to discount the Herald's claim that the weavers who voted for him were merely deluded. Nevertheless, Ellice's claim that the reformers of Coventry were in favour of the bill was corroborated not only by the size of the pro-Whig petition but also by the testimony of Henry Hunt in the same debate.(3) The prospect of the attenuation of the popular nature of the Coventry constituency must have severely tried the loyalties of Coventry radicals to the bill: that they remained supporters of it reveals their temperate assessment that nothing more radical could at present be achieved, and, more importantly, their loyalty to the cause of national reform rather than to local and particularist advantage: this despite the immense loyalty to their caste and interest group that freemen of all shades of opinion were to display down to the end of the Victorian period.

The government conceded in April the point raised by the Coventry petitioners, but made clear that no change was intended in the principle of the progressive elimination of ancient franchises. (4) The dissolution of Parliament followed almost immediately. The

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(1) ibid., iii, pp. 450 et seq. See also Coventry Herald, 11 March 1831.
(2) Parliamentary Debates, loc. cit.
(3) loc. cit.
(4) Parliamentary Debates, third series, iii, pp. 1510 et seq.

second version of the bill, introduced in July, incorporated the concession of April: it reserved for the lives of the present parties the franchises of apprentices already bound, and of the children already born of freemen by birth.(1) Again, no change was offered in the principle of the bill. The major issue was debated in Coventry in July in the County Hall. Mark Pearman, the dark blue apostate of the 1826 election who had announced his conversion to the cause of reform in the spring of 1831,(2) called for the retention of the freeman franchise. Its loss would lead to the deterioration of morals and the ribbon trade, since there would be fewer apprentices and thus less moral guidance of the young, and eventually unskilful hands at the loom. Two weavers who had supported Fyler in the 1830 election, Isaac Johnson and Thomas Newsome, spoke with him. Newsome attacked the betrayal of local rights:

> If the bill now before the House of Commons extended to every householder in the kingdom, he would not be willing to give up his right of franchise ... The bill for Reform went to cut off the rising generation. (Laughter) It cut off expectancy. (Renewed laughter). (3)

Newsome was himself a member of the Coventry Political Union, yet he attacked it for (he alleged) turning up in force to carry an amendment to Pearman's motion. William Fletcher moved the amendment complained of - calling for the extension of the franchise to all who paid scot and lot. Dr. Fitzpatrick supported it and claimed that Pearman's motion 'was only a side wind to get rid of the Bill' ... to the Tories they were indebted for all the ills under which the country laboured'. There were cheers and cries of 'It's false'. Edward Goode stressed the need not to damage the reform bill; he wished that the potwalloper and freeman franchises had been kept and the suffrage in general extended, but to press for the continuance of this right for Coventry would tend to

> endless litigation from one end of the land to the other. If the men of Coventry said, 'Continue our rights by servitude', the men of Leicester would also say, 'Continue our eldest sons'. (A voice in the crowd: 'Let them do as we do, look to their rights'. Uproar.) ... In conclusion, he thought their attention ought to be directed to the means of obtaining a cheap loaf, - to some means for relieving the national distress, than to such trifles as maintaining exclusive privileges.(4)

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(1) ibid., iv. The second version of the bill is printed as a preamble to this volume. The relevant clause is 22, p. 6.
(2) Coventry Herald, 29 April 1831. C.W.C.: Broadsides Collection: Mark Pearman, To the Freemen of the City of Coventry, 28 April 1831.
(3) Coventry Herald, 8 July 1831.
(4) loc. cit.

Thomas Perkins clinched the debate:

> While all Europe was in a blaze, determined to assert their rights, were they - the men of Coventry - to stand cavilling about their petty localities? ... Were they to annoy the Government, which was willing to concede to right and reason that which could only be wrung from tyrants of other lands by bloodshed and confusion?

Fletcher's amendment was carried by a sweeping majority.(1)

Eventually, two petitions from this confused meeting were presented to Parliament, neither of them by Ellice, who extracted himself from a difficult situation with much skill. His constituents were fully aware 'that he would not support any measure which would interfere with the Bill introduced by Government', and that was why neither petition had been sent to him. But, he pointed out, the signatories to the majority petition were willing to sacrifice their peculiar privileges, while those who were not (that is, the signatories of the minority petition) were not to be heeded anyway: 'their petition could only be received as the prayer of a few individuals. It did not contain the sentiments of the great body of the inhabitants of Coventry.'(2) Ellice's ability to disregard with impunity the wishes of his constituents when they conflicted with those of his party was a striking feature of his representation of the city. Henry Goulburn, the member for Cambridge University, was puzzled:

> All he could understand from the speech of the hon. Gentleman was, that there were two parties in Coventry, both of which were opposed to the Bill. The minority, as appeared by this petition were averse from it, and the majority, although opposed to the minority, were also opposed to the Government, and neither approved of the Bill.(3)

Sir Charles Wetherell, the arch-Tory member for Boroughbridge whose bitter fulminations against the reform bill helped to cause the riots in Bristol (where he was Recorder) in October 1831, was a vehement but diffuse advocate of the sacredness of ancient rights. He now entered the debate. The bill

> was likely to disfranchise the various useful mechanical classes, by which they would lose a valuable privilege ... As he had declared himself opposed to the disfranchisement, he should find it very convenient to enlarge the privileges of the House as to postage, for he had in consequence received

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(1) loc. cit.

(2) Parliamentary Debates, third series, iv, pp. 1192 et seq.

(3) loc. cit.

> numerous letters, and many of them double and treble, encouraging him to resist the plunder of the Corporations. He must allow, that he had not received one from Coventry, but he inferred, from all he could hear and see, that the labouring classes everywhere were beginning to recover from the delusion that had been practised upon them, which perhaps accounted for the fact, that the hon. member for Coventry was not intrusted with the petition.(1)

This bizarre mixture of irrelevance and euphoria did not advance Coventry's cause. Ellice merely claimed that

> he had presented himself to his constituents with the Bill in his hand, and was placed at the head of the poll. If he should go back he should be certain of the same majority in his favour. He must add, that, although these petitioners applied for an extension of the franchise in favour of their children, yet there was not one among them who had not signed a petition in favour of the Bill.

Bulwer did not speak to the petition, which lay on the table.(2)

Several determined efforts were made to save the freeman franchises during the committee stage of the bill. On 27 August, clause 22 was discussed. T.G.D. Estcourt, member for Oxford University, moved an amendment to the clause which would have had the effect of preserving all ancient franchises, except those enjoyed by electors in Schedule A boroughs and except insofar as ancient-right electors in other boroughs might be affected by the registration provisions of the reform bill, which would of course disfranchise non-residents. Estcourt admitted that nomination boroughs, the expense caused by non-resident electors, and elections by close corporations, had been evils: but argued that the first would be eliminated by Schedule A, the second by the disfranchisement of non-residents, and the third by the enlargement of the electorate under clause 21, the £10 householder clause. The aim of his amendment, he said, was to ensure the continuance in perpetuity of the corporator franchise, a valuable ancient privilege; he estimated that the effect of his amendment would be merely to add thirty or forty electors, in the corporation boroughs not disfranchised by Schedule A, to the 300 or so each would gain from clause 21.(3)

Estcourt thus argued for a relatively insignificant change: but to effect it proposed an amendment which would have had much more sweeping results. It was these that other speakers addressed

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(1) loc. cit.

(2) loc. cit.

(3) Journals of the House of Commons, lxxxvi, Part 2, pp. 789 et seq. Parliamentary Debates, third series, vi, pp. 722 et seq.

themselves to. A few days before, Sir Charles Wetherell had attacked clause 21 on the grounds that it 'went to introduce into this realm a pure democratic right of voting, which was little short of Universal Suffrage ... a pauper constituency'.(1) He now attacked the bill because 'under the mask of popular rights, it extended those of the higher orders, whilst it annihilated or abridged those of the lower classes'. He welcomed the amendment because it would save the freeman franchise. 'He objected to the personal disfranchisement of voters, on the same ground that he opposed the disfranchisement of boroughs in Schedules A and B.' He did not agree with Estcourt that non-resident freemen should be disfranchised:

> He would put it to the noble Lord and the right hon. Gentlemen opposite, who he supposed had votes for the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge - he would ask them, why Masters of Arts not resident should be entitled to vote, while non-resident freemen of cities and boroughs were robbed of their rights? ... Of all the clauses in the Bill, he thought the one before them the most obnoxious, and it should have his opposition.(2)

Colonel Charles Sibthorp, member for Lincoln and an even greater Tory than Wetherell, agreed with him: 'it was nothing less than spoliation to take away those rights ... which had been earned by the sweat of the brow'.(3) Althorp put the government case, which was, once again, that the freemen were corrupt and that the £10 householders would be a less venal electorate; several speakers agreed with him. Some others wished to retain the freemen franchise, though not always for non-residents. In one respect, however, these speakers were united: their common concern was the freeman franchise: they showed no interest in either the narrow group of corporators whom Estcourt cared for or - which was more significant - the scot-and-lot and potwalloper franchises that his amendment would also have perpetuated. They had no partisans: presumably because they were, to the minds of the Tory defenders of the freemen's rights, both considerably more popular and therefore dangerous, and considerably less 'chartered' and thus less likely, in their abrogation, to entail the loss of the privileges of higher orders.

In the event Estcourt's amendment was lost by seventeen votes to eighty-nine. Only three of those who voted for it had voted for the reform bill at its second reading on 6 July; the other

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(1) Parliamentary Debates, third series, vi, pp. 600 et seq.

(2) ibid., pp. 722 et seq.

(3) loc. cit.

fourteen had voted against it.(1) A few days later the debate on the clause was resumed. Edmund Peel moved an amendment which would have perpetuated the franchise for resident freemen by servitude, birth or marriage - but not, he made clear, for freemen by gift or purchase. Peel's amendment also excluded the other types of ancient-right elector. Edmund Peel had voted against the reform bill at its second reading in July; his amendment was supported by other Tories - Marcus Beresford, W.H. Miller, Robert Peel, Henry Goulburn, Digby Wrangham, Arthur Trevor, Cresset Pelham, Colonel Sibthorp, and of course Sir Charles Wetherell, whose language extravagently pictured the fate awaiting those who abolished rights which 'for 800 years ... had been as sacred as amy personal right to property':

> The Paymaster of the Forces and the Chancellor of the Exchequer belonged to the hereditary peerage of England, and if they, by the 22nd clause of the Bill, remorselessly wrested from the boroughs and corporate towns their most cherished hereditary rights, on what grounds could they refuse their assent to a proposition which would reduce them to Citizen Russell and Citizen Spencer?(2)

Robert Peel expressed the same fears more temperately; there was general agreement on the Tory side that the freeman franchise was an hereditary right which it would be unjust to remove. Edmund Peel made the most sensible and practical speech, pointing out that it was folly to alienate from 'the future constituted and parliamentary authorities of the country' freemen whose franchise had 'hitherto constituted a safe connection between the working classes of the people and this House';(3) and that even if the freemen were more corrupt than £10 householders (which was not proved) there could hardly be any extra danger in allowing their franchise to last for ever, since the government itself was willing to concede it for the lives of the present holders.

No Tory spoke against the amendment. Some M.P.s who had voted for the reform bill supported the amendment, chiefly on the grounds that the clause would reduce the size of the electorate; Captain Berkeley, Lewis Buck, Sir Matthew White Ridley, Henry Burton, T.G. Green, George Robinson and J.P.B. Chichester comprised this group. But Berkeley and Ridley said that their freemen constituents in Gloucester and Newcastle-on-Tyne were more willing to give up the franchise than the bill. Other liberals who represented freemen

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(1) ibid., vi, pp. 722 et seq; iv, pp. 907 et seq.

(2) ibid., vi, pp. 880 et seq.

(3) loc. cit.

boroughs, and who opposed the amendment - Daniel Whittle Harvey of Colchester and Thomas Dundas of York - rather unctuously made a similar point about their constituents. The weight of liberal sentiment was behind Russell, who once again offered the government's refusal to concede the freeman franchise; in the division the amendment was lost by 210 votes to 131. Berkeley and Robinson changed their minds and voted against it. Naturally, Edward Ellice voted against it too.(1)

Arthur Trevor, the Tory member for Durham, then moved another amendment, to allow existing non-resident freemen to vote in their native boroughs for the rest of their lives - as resident freemen were to be permitted to do under clause 22. 'If there was any class more injuriously and cruelly treated than another in this bill', said Trevor, 'it was that class denominated freemen'. In the division the amendment was defeated by 151 votes to 38; of the 38, 33 had voted against the reform bill at its second reading in July. The government conceded one very minor amendment affecting the future franchise of freemen by marriage; otherwise, the clause was passed as the Whigs had framed it.(2)

But in October the arguments were rehearsed again in the House of Lords during the second reading of the bill. Tory peers mingled abuse of the £10 householders with praise for the respectability of the freemen, rage at the confiscation of their rights, and dreadful warnings of the peril to higher privilege that this spoliation carried in its train. The hereditary principle, said the Marquis of Bute,

> was the soul of the monarchy. But by destroying the Corporations - by taking away those privileges which the present race of freemen enjoyed, and which they expected to transmit to their children, this Bill destroyed that, and, by destroying that, would injure the hereditary principle, and would certainly injure the monarchy.(3)

The Earl of Harrowby regarded the ancient franchises as a sort of property which ought not lightly to be confiscated. The Earl of Haddington attacked the plan

> to trample upon the chartered rights of the freemen throughout England ... If the freemen were corrupt, a remedy for this might have been found without any violation of right. This principle of confiscation, combined with that of uniformity of the franchise, another of the pernicious principles of the Bill, was decidedly objectionable; it had

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(1) loc. cit. Journals of the House of Commons, lxxxvi, Part 2, (1830-31), p. 800.

(2) Parliamentary Debates, third series, vi, pp. 911 et seq. Journals of the House of Commons, loc. cit.

(3) Parliamentary Debates, third series, vii, pp. 1015 et seq.

> no inseparable connection with disfranchisement of nomination boroughs, or the gift of Representation to large towns; and he ventured to say, that if the noble Earl had brought forward a measure comprehending the two latter objects only it would not have experienced so determined a resistance.(1)

The bill, thought Lord Wynford,

> far from restoring the Constitution, was getting rid of the best part of the constituency of the country, and extending the worst part of it. The chief of the electors of England were burgage-tenants, freemen, freeholders, and householders. They were about to get rid of the first and the best, and to increase the last and the worst ... A table, a joint-stool, and a straw bed were the only implements necessary to set up this pauper constituency ... the voter might, at the time of giving his vote, not be worth a shilling in the world. See the difference with regard to the freeholder and the freeman; the freeholder must have his freehold in possession at the time of giving his vote, and the freeman must, before he acquired his freedom, have served his seven years with respectability. He admitted that the law with regard to freemen ought to be altered ... He was a reformer; but he warned their lordships how they took away the rights of persons who had not abused their rights; for if they admitted such a principle as a just one, then the right of their lordships even to their seats in that House became a very precarious right.(2)

Lyndhurst attacked the substitution, for the freeman electors, of the £10 householders - 'the worst species of franchise which your Lordships can establish', a suffrage similar to the evil scot-and-lot vote.(3) Eldon, proud of his status as a freeman of Newcastle-on-Tyne, bitterly regretted that the rights of his 700 fellows would be swamped under the bill by '2,700 3s.6d. a week men'.(4)

Brougham's reply to these vehement attacks on the government's plans was to stress that the rights of property were the informing principle of the bill, and that this was why the freemen franchise was to be annulled:

> the right of voting, in freemen, is wholly unconnected with any property of any kind whatsoever; the being a freeman, is no test of being worth a shilling. Freemen may be, and very often are, common day-labourers, spending every week their whole weekly gains, menial servants, having the right by birth - men living in almshouses - parish paupers.(5)

But the strength of the opposition to the disfranchisement of the freemen electors led the government to think again after the Lords

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(1) ibid., vii, pp. 1145 et seq, 1377 et seq.
(2) ibid., viii, pp. 198 et seq.
(3) ibid., viii, pp. 276 et seq.
(4) ibid., viii, pp. 210 et seq.
(5) ibid., viii, pp. 220 et seq.

rejected the bill at its second reading in October. In November the Whig leaders met the Tory peers, Harrowby and Wharncliffe, in an attempt to negotiate a compromise. On 16 November there was between Grey and Wharncliffe 'some discussion as to the possibility of retaining the present rights of voting, there having been great objection to the sweeping change of all that now existed, for the purpose of introducing one uniform right'. They did not agree, and did not discuss the matter for long since they thought it 'a very subordinate point'.(1) A fortnight later, however, the government thought it sufficiently important to be likely to conciliate the peers if a concession were made.

> At times there was reason to hope that, with some moderate concessions to the fears and prejudices of the Peers, the Bill would be allowed to pass ... Under this impression, Lord Grey and Lord Althorp again took counsel together and amended the bill in a conservative spirit, by modifying the clauses for the disfranchisement of the freemen, and taking the taxes, instead of the population, in any borough, as the chief element in the basis of its enfranchisement.(2)

Accordingly, these two concessions were embodied in the third version of the bill which Russell introduced in the Commons in December. This was the version that finally passed, with some minor amendments.(3) Clause 31 of the bill (and clause 32 of the act) disfranchised all burgesses or freemen enrolled since 1 March 1831, except for burgesses or freemen who achieved that status through birth or servitude; it also excluded certain categories of burgesses or freemen by birth enrolled since 1 March 1831, and there was naturally a residence qualification for those burgesses or freemen who were enfranchised. But the effect of the clause was to preserve the franchise for all Coventry freemen, provided that they were resident within seven statute miles of the city.(4)

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(1) Henry Earl Grey, ed., The Correspondence of the Late Earl Grey with H.M. King William IV (2 vols, London, 1867), i, pp. 464 et seq.

(2) D. le Marchant, Memoir of John Charles, Viscount Althorp, Third Earl Spencer (London, 1876), pp. 372 et seq.

(3) Parliamentary Debates, third series, ix, pp. 156 et seq. Eli Halévy, The Triumph of Reform 1830-1841 (London, 1961 ed.), pp. 47 et seq.

(4) 2 and 3 William IV, c. 45, clause 32. The bill presented in December 1831 is printed in Parliamentary Debates, third series, ix, Appendix. The question of the freeman franchise is briefly but accurately treated in Charles Seymour, Electoral Reform in England and Wales (New Haven, 1915), pp. 27 et seq, and Eli Halévy, loc. cit. The statement in Norman Gash, Politics in the Age of Peel (London, 1953), p. 96, that the ancient borough franchises were continued in perpetuity only in respect of the burgesses, freemen, and liverymen of the City of London, and of freeholders and burgage tenants in cities and towns that were counties of themselves, is mistaken - though it is true that the franchises of these groups were continued by clauses 31 and 32 of the act.

The battle had been won: but not by radicals, in either country or Parliament. The Coventry radicals had shown throughout that they preferred to support the Whig bill (and to attempt rather feebly the enlargement of its general suffrage provisions) rather than to rock the boat by seeking to preserve their local popular franchise. For many years after the reform act, the Conservative Coventry Standard drew the appropriate lesson from the liberals' partiality for a middle-class electorate and their disparagement of the freemen's right: it advised them to trust, for the preservation of their privileges, the Tories and the House of Lords who had striven to defend them, and to whom the liberals had reluctantly conceded the point.

III

The Burning of Beck's Mill, 1831

Before Russell amended the reform bill for the freemen's benefit, the rejection of the bill by the House of Lords in October 1831 led to a demonstration in the city against the bishops and the Lords which provides a striking (and somewhat misleading) picture of civic unanimity. The public meeting convened by the Mayor on the requisition of 100 respectable inhabitants could not be accommodated in County Hall and was adjourned by the Mayor to Cross Cheaping. From the balcony of the City Hotel speeches attacking the pretensions of the bishops and the House of Lords were made by men as diverse socially as Abraham Herbert, the ribbon manufacturer, James Beck the banker (of Allesley Hall), Fitzpatrick the surgeon, Lea the dark blues' solicitor, Alderman Merridew (an opponent of Ellice in 1826 but now a reformer), Henry Cadwallader Adams of Ansty Hall, and Edward Goode and David Smith, ribbon weavers. Smith spoke of the 'duty of all, rich and poor, to come forward in support of his Majesty's ministers'.(1) Goode's words reflect not only the moderate nature of his reformism but also his self-effacing acceptance of rank and class, which seems inconsistent with radicalism at all:

> it would have been gratifying to him to have occupied a place in the crowd below, and to have given place to men more respectable in circumstances and efficient in ability than himself; but he appeared as the humble representative of the great crowd of artisans by whom he was surrounded, and he could assure them he considered it no small honour to address such an assembly ... they had met, not as anarchists, but as friends of order.(2)

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(1) Coventry Herald, 14 October 1831.

(2) Coventry Herald, 14 October 1831. C.W.C.: Broadsides Collection: Public Meeting, 10 October 1831.

There were Tories to whom Goode was a dangerous subversive: men like John Southam Evans, ribbon manufacturer, Thomas Wilmot, solicitor, W.T. Bree, the Rector of Allesley, John and Robert Bunney, bankers, and Alderman Joseph Phillips, who signed the declaration of Warwickshire men against the reform bill, on the grounds that 'extensive changes should be attempted only under a paramount necessity'.(1) At the other extreme there were Coventry radicals who, had they been invited to speak at the October meeting, would not have done so in terms like Goode's: men such as those (whoever they were) who caused Edward Bromfield to issue, allegedly on behalf of the Association of the Friends of the People, a handbill which William Reader, the city's steward, read with horror at Quarter Sessions:

> To the people of England! Pay no more Tithes! No more Church Rates! - without compulsion; but, in God's name, do not withhold payment of the Taxes; rather contribute an extra mite, if necessary, to support the King and his ministers in this fearful emergency. Mark your detestation of the haughty, heartless and overgrown Hierarchy, by absenting yourselves and families from your Parish Church! ... Remember, it was the Bishops who caused the Bill to be rejected!(2)

The existence of uncompromising radicalism in the city is further demonstrated by the widespread circulation of the unstamped press in the city - sold, it was said, even in Merridew's bookshop - (3) and perhaps by the way 'nearly 100 most respectable tradesmen and artisans' chose to celebrate the General Fast Day in the Coventry Political Union's room in March 1832. They 'sat down to a most excellent dinner, of hot beef, boiled legs of mutton, roast veal, etc., etc. ... Two handsome plates were first cut off, and sent, with a jug of best ale, to the victims of the knowledge-gagging laws, at this time in Coventry New Bastile.' Fifteen or sixteen individuals had been committed by Coventry magistrates for selling unstamped newspapers in the five or six days before the dinner.(4)

Yet Goode's words at the October meeting suggest how potent habits of deference could be in a Coventry radical: and the meeting itself seems to reflect a broad and united civic enthusiasm for the bill - a feeling which was shared even by Henry Wreford, the Unitarian minister, whose name is never otherwise attached to political activities and who confessed as much. But, 'the system

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(1) Warwick and Warwickshire General Advertiser, 4 June 1831.
(2) P.R.O.: H.O. 52/15, John Carter to Melbourne, 17 October 1831. Coventry Herald, 21 October 1831.
(3) Poor Man's Guardian, 14 July 1832.
(4) ibid., 24 March 1832.

of non-representation was productive of much crime and immorality'.(1) These impressions are reinforced by the conduct of a public meeting held during the crisis week of May 1832, chaired by the Mayor and held on Greyfriars Green. Before the meeting the Coventry Political Union rallied the town, with the flag of the union and a crimson banner bearing the slogan 'Our king and the people' - with the first two words covered with black crepe and the phrase 'A Cheap Republic' substituted. There was also a tricolour flag, 'and about the middle of the procession was hoisted an effigy of the Gallant Duke, decked out in a suit of military indescribables'. Kenilworth Political Union joined the procession, with flags and music. On Greyfriars Green the Mayor and gentlemen were seated on waggons. They asked for the 'Cheap Republic' flag to be removed. There were murmurings in the crowd, but when Arthur Gregory appealed for its removal for the sake of civic unity it was taken away. Speeches by the same men who had spoken at the October meeting followed, all expressing support for the bill and the need for peaceable activity. 200 joined the Coventry Political Union on that day; 370 others had already joined since the government had been defeated on Lyndhurst's amendment. 100 more joined in the third week in May.(2)

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(1) Coventry Herald, 14 October 1831.

(2) Coventry Herald, 18 May, 25 May 1832. In its disciplined and moderate demeanour during the crisis of May 1832 the Coventry Political Union owed much to the influence of the Birmingham Political Union - the original inspiration for the Coventry body and its guide at this crucial time. When news of the government's fall reached Coventry, delegates from the CPU went to Birmingham for advice; on their return the CPU resolved to call for the public meeting and to support any action the council of the BPU decided on. 5,000 from Coventry, Warwick, Leamington, Bedworth and Kenilworth attended the protest meeting of reformers from Warwickshire and the Black Country held in Birmingham on 7 May 1832; A.F. Gregory was among them. Three weeks later Thomas Attwood and his Birmingham colleagues passed through Coventry on their return from presenting a reform petition to Parliament. The Wonder coach was met at the London road by a procession which had marched from Little Park Street. 'Mr. Attwood and Mr. W.G. Lewis having been literally forced out of the coach, the procession, consisting of several thousand persons, mostly wearing the Attwood medal, suspended to the Union Jack, immediately returned to Coventry.' After Attwood had addressed the crowd from the City Hotel he and his friends were escorted by the procession to the New Allesley Road, where they were given three cheers before they left for Birmingham. Coventry Herald, 11 May, 18 May 1832. Report of the Proceedings of the Great Meeting of the Inhabitants of the Midland Districts held at Birmingham, 7 May 1832 (Birmingham, 1832), pp. 3 et seq, An Account of the Public Entry given by the Inhabitants of Birmingham to Thomas Attwood (Birmingham 1832).

The news of the passing of the reform bill was followed by the ringing of the church bells in Coventry,(1) and the substitution of a Great Reform Procession for the Godiva procession usual at the Show Fair in June. As the Coventry Herald put it:

> The procession of her ladyship ... is merely the commemoration of the traditional release obtained by the 'Fair Godiva' for the oppressed inhabitants of Coventry from the tyranny of a feudal baron. Now, thank Heaven, we have to celebrate a nobler triumph, - the freedom of our country from the mercenary grasp of that detested oligarchy - the Borough-mongering tyrants, and lordly oppressors.(2)

The procession paraded the town on Monday, 25 June, led by some children bearing a banner with the device 'May the hopes of the rising generation be realised', and then by the Champion of Reform in white armour, mounted on a charger and carrying the Reform Act. The Coventry Political Union followed, and then the many benefit societies of the town, arranged in wards. There were many bands and flags.(3) Much to the joy of one Coventry radical, these included a large tricolour with the motto 'To the memory of the immortal Thomas Paine'. 'The flag was carried in the procession by two men, without the least opposition, amidst the acclamations of the children and grandchildren of those men who had formerly burnt in effigy that great statesman.'(4) The political unions from Nuneaton, Kenilworth, Leamington and Hinckley joined the procession too. Alexander Somerville was at that time stationed in Coventry; the court of enquiry into his court martial had been held and he was soon to receive his discharge.

> It so occurred that I was on sentry at the front barrack gate, when the procession passed. Not one of the many thousands knew me personally, but each band ceased to play as it came near the barrack gate; each trade or section of a political union, halted in front of the gate, as pre-arranged by a master of ceremonies, and three cheers, loud and long, were given for 'Somerville for ever!'(5)

Illuminations had been proposed too. At the meeting at the Craven Arms that organised the celebrations it had been said that some rich citizens were willing to subscribe to a fund to provide comforts for the poor if no windows in the town were illuminated. Some disliked the reform bill and wished neither to pretend to like it nor to invite the stone-throwing that failure to do so would

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(1) Coventry Herald, 8 June 1832.
(2) ibid., 15 June 1832.
(3) Coventry Herald, 22 June 1832.
(4) Poor Man's Guardian, 14 July 1832.
(5) Somerville, op. cit., p. 340. C.R.O.: Miscellaneous Letters, Thomas Gill to Secretary of Leamington Political Union, 20 June 1832.

result in. Radicals like Whittem and Marriott persuaded through a vote for illuminations on the grounds that 'a good illumination was calculated to make even a dunce a good politician'.(1) It was said that the first meeting had been thinly attended and so a later meeting was held to reconsider the question. Almost everybody, even liberals like Henry Lea and John Royle, another solicitor, argued against illuminated windows; a collection for the poor would be much more useful. John Hands, a liberal ribbon manufacturer, argued that the whole proposal was a plot thought up by people who lived in courtyards, whose windows were less dangerously exposed than those on thoroughfares, and who would not have to illuminate them anyway. Edward Goode's argument that the poor preferred illuminations cut no ice; but no decision was taken.(2) Yet a third meeting decided against illuminations, despite much opposition from Edward and Thomas Goode.(3) The celebrations over the passing of the reform bill aroused more controversial verbiage than the political debate itself had. This fact reflects the constant apprehension of the affluent that popular merrymaking, in a badly policed town, might quickly get out of hand and turn to popular violence. Thus the impression of comfortable civic unity which is conveyed by the support given to the reform bill by men of all classes, by the lack of deep political controversy at the 1831 election, by the essential moderation of the political union, is misleading: since men could unite in supporting the bill although they hoped for different results from it and although they were divided on other essentials: and since, above all, there existed below the thin strata of the affluent and the articulate the wordless many, who may have attended meetings but who did not speak at them, who had votes but whose electoral independence was reduced by bribery and bullying, who most often were mentioned in the newspapers when they took their pleasure in unlicenced violence, and who, most importantly, were too harassed by the cares of poverty to regard the reform bill, welcome though it was, as their most important concern or as the measure most likely to alleviate their misery. One piece of popular, uncerebrated support for the reform bill is recorded: the burning of an effigy of the Bishop of Lichfield and Coventry - 'a fine portly figure, in full canonicals and mitre' - instead of

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(1) Coventry Herald, 15 June 1832.

(2) Coventry Herald, 22 June 1832.

(3) loc. cit.

Guy Fawkes, on Greyfriars Green on 5 November 1831.(1) But a few days later this vicarious folk-violence was to be outdone in a more real burning - of a hated steam factory.

In the spring of 1830 the ribbon trade improved and the extreme destitution that the weavers had suffered from in January and February disappeared.(2) In September the weavers met at the Hill and Hollow Close on the London Road and decided to ask for the restoration of the list of prices that had prevailed before the reduction of 15% in 1829; the weavers wanted to profit from better times. A few days later the weavers' committee (whose secretary was now Benjamin Poole) saw the manufacturers and presented to them a list for the plain trade very similar to the old list of 1826; three manufacturers signed it but most were willing to give an advance only when the others did. A similar list for the figured and gauze trade was also drawn up by the weavers. The figured masters also showed reluctance to sign. The aim of the weavers' leaders so far had been to persuade them to behave without violence or even the threat of force: Edward Goode had deprecated the fact that a crowd of weavers had followed the committee round on its visits to manufacturers because this looked like intimidation.(3) When, after the masters had refused to raise the list of prices, another weavers' meeting was held at the Hill and Hollow Close David Smith argued that each group of weavers should wait on their employer and ask him again; mass action, he thought, was inappropriate. He and Goode displayed the same moderation in both political and industrial matters. But his cautious approach was swept aside; there were speeches and calls for a strike. They gained the day, and the weavers marched out from the close four or five abreast up the London Road into Coventry, calling out weavers from their looms as they went. In the next few days the parade of weavers waited on many masters and only three refused to sign the new lists; one of them was Henry Merridew, the proprietor of the Coventry Herald. Thomas Cope, one of the largest manufacturers, was cornered by the weavers in Horsfall's public house and signed on the spot. Eventually even the three cracked and they signed too. After a few days the strike was called off at a torchlight meeting of 2,000 weavers.(4) Unity and restrained militancy had brought

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(1) Coventry Herald, 11 November 1831. Poor Man's Guardian, 14 July 1832.

(2) Coventry Herald, 25 March, 9 April, 23 April 1830. See the tables in the appendix for the decline in the number of paupers in 1830.

(3) Coventry Herald, 10 September, 17 September, 24 September 1830.

(4) Coventry Herald, 24 September, 1 October 1830.

results. But not for long: in October fifteen manufacturers decided to return to the list of prices of September 1829; they were afraid of being undercut, they said, if they paid by the new list, because there was still a good deal of surplus labour in the trade in Warwickshire. The weavers became resigned to defeat: meetings were poorly attended, and calls to stop the looms again were heeded by only some of the weavers. The last weavers' meeting of the dispute was told firmly by Adams (of the Coventry Political Union) that a strike was useless because the masters were determined not to give way. The strike ended. This failure convinced William Fletcher that a general union for all weavers in north Warwickshire - something that had been under discussion for some weeks - was all the more necessary to maintain the list of prices.(1)

The second half of 1831 was a period of great excitement and social tension in Coventry. Apprehension about the fate of the reform bill was aggravated by the activities of Captain Swing in the countryside near the city. They had begun with the burning of a rick in Foleshill in November 1830;(2) in the following year £300 worth of wheat was burnt in Brandon and two barns at Bilton Common.(3) More important as a cause of almost febrile dread was the approach of cholera, following an epidemic of smallpox in the winter. A death from cholera in the Black Prince public house, Much Park Street, was suspected in August, and thereafter an epidemic was feared, especially since the pythogenic theory of pathology pointed to Coventry as a place most likely to suffer because of its 'many houses in close courts, so thickly crowded with human beings ... the wonder is, that from so extensive a collection of putridity, pestilence has not been long before this engendered in its most fatal character'.(4) Throughout the autumn of 1831 and the early months of 1832 the apprehension increased and is reflected in the setting up of an ad hoc board of health to attempt to clean up the city - a herculean task - to prevent the infection arising, in the publication of simple prophylactic measures that Coventrians could follow.(5)

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(1) ibid., 8 October, 15 October 1830.

(2) P.R.O.: H.O. 52/11, T. Morris to Melbourne, 2 December 1830.

(3) Coventry Herald, 18 February, 21 October 1831.

(4) ibid., 28 October 1831. See also ibid., 25 March, 5 August 1831

(5) ibid., 18 November, 25 November, 2 December, 9 December, 30 December 1831, 6 January, 13 January, 27 January, 17 February, 1 June, 15 June, 29 June, 6 July, 20 July, 3 August 1832. The disease reached Newbold-on-Avon in June 1832 but did not attack the city.

One of these was the avoidance of care and anxiety, something which it was difficult to attain in Coventry in 1831, above all because of the continuing and worsening crisis in the ribbon trade. There was more unemployment in the trade in 1831 than in 1830. By the end of the year, out of a total of more than 4,400 looms in Coventry (most of them engine looms without a jacquard apparatus) only 1,000 were in full use; 1,464 were in use for only half the time and almost 2,000 were totally idle. Because of the greater proportion of single-hand looms in the areas to the north of the city they were much more liable to fluctuations in trade than Coventry itself.(1) The single-hand loom was in grim competition with the engine loom - a battle that the hand-loom could not win. On an engine loom 'a man will make ten pieces of 20d lutestrings, with the same labour that another on a single-hand loom will make little more than a piece and a half; he will also make six pieces of 30d, whilst the single-hand weaver makes one piece and a half, of that breadth also'.(2) There were 3,000 looms in Nuneaton, many of them single-hand looms; by November 1831 more than 2,300 looms were idle, and 2,700 people were receiving poor relief and soup doles given three times a week. The Newdigate family of Arbury Hall were similarly distributing soup, and clothing, to the poor of Chilvers Coton. There were 2,691 weavers and other workers in the ribbon trade in Foleshill; at the end of 1831 1,629 were completely unemployed and 1,062 partially employed for no more than several days in the week. Even weavers in full employ in Foleshill, however, only averaged between 4s.3d. and 3s.8d. a week in the autumn of 1831. Another estimate put the figures even lower - at between 2s. and 2s.6d. Foleshill weavers in work were worse off than those living on parochial relief; their earnings had been forced down below the subsistence level.(3) Coventry's misery was partly the result of north Warwickshire's: it was 'impossible for the distresses of the latter to be prevented from spreading to the former'.(4) In the city some men in the autumn of 1831 were earning less than they would have got under parochial relief,(5) they were being paid 2s.6d. a piece for work which according to the

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(1) Coventry Herald, 20 January 1832, P.P.: H.C. 678 (1831-32) xix, pp. 54, 84.
(2) Coventry Herald, 11 November 1831.
(3) ibid., 4 November, 9 December, 16 December 1831. P.P.: H.C.678 (1831-32) xix, pp. 62 et seq.
(4) Coventry Herald, 16 September 1831.
(5) This despite the current reduction in the scale of outdoor relief: see Chapter Eight.

list of prices they should have been paid 7s.6d. for. For even the inadequate 1829 list of prices was by 1831 being increasingly abandoned: the pressure of competition among both masters and weavers was leading the former to offer, and the latter to accept, work paid for at much lower rates than those of the list of prices.(1)

The abandonment of the list of prices by some manufacturers caused problems for those still abiding by it. One solution, put forward by some masters, was a reduction in the 1829 list to bring it into line with prevailing market rates: a further 15% reduction was proposed in the summer of 1831. The Coventry weavers met at the Rose and Crown, High Street, to address the manufacturers. They appealed to their masters' self-interest; any reduction of the wages paid to weavers would result merely in a reduction of prices paid by wholesalers, and the loss of income to shopkeepers of the city. But most eloquent was an appeal to the manufacturers' sense of decency.

> Gentlemen, you are in someinstances our kinsmen, and with few solitary exceptions, our immediate neighbours. The City that gave you birth is the place of our nativity ... But above all, consider the time when this attempt is made. It is in 1831, the year big with such momentous events, - the time when freedom and liberty are making rapid marches, and the fetters which have bound so many of the nations of Europe are about to be broken - the year in which Britons anticipate the commencement of that improvement which will gradually restore those comforts their fathers enjoyed.(2)

More than sixty manufacturers, that is, all in the city except three, responded to this appeal by signifying their reluctance to reduce the list of prices; the three went ahead with a reduction which the weavers could do no more than deplore.(3) Some of the sixty then followed their example.(4) Yet the signing of a declaration which they did not abide by shows that even these masters still felt the ghostly hand of paternalism. For the weavers the conventions of paternalism possessed still a real force: the sentiments expressed in their address in June reveal the extent to which some weavers felt that the claims of kindred and neighbourly proximity transcended lines of class. They help to explain the moderation of Coventry radicalism and are themselves explained as the survival among the weavers of old habits of thought in a

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(1) P.P.: H.C. 678 (1831-32) xix, pp. 59, 105.
(2) Coventry Herald, 10 June 1831.
(3) ibid., 17 June, 24 June, 8 July, 15 July 1831.
(4) P.P.: H.C. 678 (1831-32) xix, p. 59.

period when they were becoming increasingly inappropriate.

In the autumn came two developments that show a more militant response: one was the foundation in Coventry of a branch of the National Association for the Protection of Labour, about which tantalisingly little can be discovered;(1) the other was the eruption into the industrial life of the city of the violence endemic in it - violence which expressed itself in September, for example, in the fate meted out to a professional informer who collected details of false measures given in public houses. He was recognised in Smithford Street, chased with cries of 'Mad dog', was captured and his clothes torn from his back, and was at length rescued by constables, 'his eyes so sealed with mud as to render him unable to discriminate between a short half-pint and a twenty-gallon imperial measure'.(2) The brutal dimension to life also expressed itself in, and was encouraged by, the revolting scenes that accompanied and followed the public execution of Mary Ann Higgins, aged 19, on Whitley Common in August 1831.(3) The surprising fact is not industrial violence, but its evident infrequency and its moderate nature.

By the autumn of 1831 some masters were again reducing prices, and the others gave notice that they would have to follow suit unless the list were uniformly adhered to. By chalked notices on the walls of the town a weavers' meeting was called for the morning of Monday, 7 November, at Cross Cheaping: the purpose of the meeting was to seek the re-establishment of the 1829 list, not an increase of prices. 200 assembled at Cross Cheaping; they dispersed to collect more men and met again in the George Inn in Little Park Street at 10 a.m. Here a committee of seven first-hand journeymen, including Edward Goode, David Smith and George Baddeley, was appointed to ask for the help of the magistrates to press the manufacturers to reaffirm the list. The men at the George were, meanwhile, to travel round the town to inform other weavers that there was to be another meeting at Cross Cheaping at 2 p.m. to receive a report from the committee. The George meeting was not stormy; no violence was expected. The committee

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(1) Coventry Herald, 2 September 1831.
(2) ibid., 16 September 1831.
(3) Coventry Herald, 12 August, 19 August 1831. A crowd of 15,000 witnessed her execution for poisoning her uncle for a few guineas so that she could marry. The real culprit, her lover, aged 30, was acquitted on a technicality and came to witness her execution until he was driven off by the outraged mob. Mary Higgins hung on the gallows for one hour, 'during which time about 20 females rubbed their necks with the right hand of the deceased, as a remedy for what are called wens or thick necks'. Afterwards her body was dissected in the Bridewell and exhibited to 'the merely idle and curious gaze of men, women and children of both sexes in one indiscriminate mass'.

of seven saw the magistrates who promised their help if the weavers could not succeed without them. About midday the seven met the manufacturers' committee, asked them to convene a meeting of the manufacturers, and fixed on 2 p.m. as the time to meet them again for their answer. At 2 o'clock the two committees met; the masters' committee was willing to call a manufacturers' meeting, but could not decide on a time and asked for half an hour to consider. The seven left to tell the weavers at Cross Cheaping of the masters' committee's willingness: but found no weavers there. While waiting for their committee the weavers had met by chance the superintendent of Josiah Beck's factory, the only steam-power ribbon factory in Coventry; in a growing mood of excitement and anger they got into an argument with him about the making of ribbons by steam when hand-loom weavers were unemployed. Shortly before the committee arrived, the weavers had moved off towards the factory, in violent mood, breaking windows on the way. The committee 'were then very anxious to go down and draw the men away ... but they were checked by the thought that by so doing they might expose themselves to the suspicion of being promoters of the mischief'.(1) Perplexed, they arrived at Samuel Hennell's house in Hill Street about 3 p.m. to keep their appointment with the manufacturers' committee. Hennell took them to the top floor of his warehouse, and showed them columns of smoke rising from Beck's factory nearly a mile away.(2)

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(1) P.P. [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 220.

(2) P.P.: H.C. 678 (1831-32) xix, p. 57; [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 220 et seq. - a highly circumstantial account of the day by Edward Goode, David Smith and George Baddeley. See also Coventry Herald, 11 November 1831. Beck, a machine maker, was constructing his factory on the third floor of his house in New Buildings, near the Sherbourne and the Mill Dam; Sainsbury's supermarket occupies the site today. Beck had a power loom in the attic which was in use for the manufacture of ribbons; there was also a throwing mill in the attic with some silk in it. On the third floor there were eight steam looms; six, unfinished, belonged to Beck and two, which had apparently been at work for some months, belonged to a ribbon manufacturer called Christopher Woodhouse. He was to pay 1s. a week to Beck for loom-standing and 4s. for steam power; Beck had a steam engine on the premises. There was also an a-la-bar loom belonging to Messrs. Merry and Brown that had come to be repaired. Coventry Herald, 30 March 1832.

About 2.30 p.m. 200 men had arrived at Beck's door and asked to see his machinery. Beck, temporising, said that he was willing for one man to look at it and invited Joseph Day, a weaver, inside. There was a general rush forward and the door was hurriedly closed by Beck's servants; Beck was unfortunately left outside with the weavers. They beat him, but allowed him to climb over the wall into William Browett's garden; Mrs. Browett hid him in their store-room. Five minutes later the weavers followed and got him out; they placed him in a hand cart, threw him in the mud in Ironmonger Row, and knocked him senseless. When he recovered a weaver called John Deeming said 'Make him kneel down and swear he knows no one'; Beck was dragged home and made to order his servants to open the door; he was threatened with death if he did not. 'Now, you bugger, I will make you destroy your own invention', said one man. The mob surged into the loom shop and a weaver called Thomas Burbury called out 'Fire it, fire it!'; the windows were smashed, silk was ripped from the looms and thrown out of the windows, and the looms were broken with hammers and iron bars conveniently to hand. Then the weavers set fire to the wreckage.(1) There was a great deal of dry wood in the house and very quickly the fire had caught hold; within twenty minutes the roof fell in; by 4 p.m. the house was in ruins.(2) Meanwhile, Beck had escaped to the privy when the weavers entered the loom shop; a man came to the door and said 'The only way to save your life is to be missing'. Beck left but was found in an entry by a weaver called William Westwick, who said 'You bugger, will you do so any more?'; presumably Westwick meant to ask if he would weave by steam again. Beck said he would not, was given three or four more blows by the weavers, made his escape to Mrs. Russell's house in Hill Top, where he hid under the dresser, and when followed again by the mob went to Mr. Moy's timber yard, where he had a good view of his burning house.(3) William Wood, Woodhouse's superintendent, hid in the garret behind some silk reels as the mob broke the looms; when the floor was burning beneath his feet he tied a blanket to a bed post and let himself out of a window to the ground.(4)

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(1) Coventry Herald, 30 March 1832.

(2) ibid., 11 November 1831.

(3) ibid., 30 March 1832.

(4) C.R.O.: Box labelled 'Anti-machine riots, 1831': Serjeant Adams's brief in the case of Merry and Brown versus the inhabitants of the County of the City of Coventry, pp. 10 et seq.

The magistrates arrived at the factory during the fire. The Riot Act was read, and all the soldiers in the barracks called out - fourteen men in all - from the 14th Light Dragoons and the 9th Hussars, under Lieutenant-Colonel Ewart.(1) The soldiers dispersed the mob without difficulty or violence, cleared the streets, and stood guard at the gaol, the gas-works and Day's loom-shop to prevent further trouble. Shops, public houses and the theatre were closed. 400 respectable inhabitants were sworn in as special constables.(2) Among them were the seven members of the weavers' committee, eager from the first to assist in suppressing the riot.

> 'Supposing', they said to the magistrates, 'they were sworn in as special constables, would it prevent them from attending to their interests as weavers?' The Mayor, Thomas Morris, answered, 'Most assuredly not; it would show that they were good men, and honest men, and afford a stronger proof of their fitness to attend to that duty'.

The special constables and the soldiers patrolled the streets all night, the seven taking their station with a sergeant in front of Day's house 'on account of the exclamations which had been made by some of the mob against him'. But the night was quiet.(3)

The following morning the Coventry postmaster wrote to Melbourne to tell him that 'our city is perfectly tranquil and has no appearance of being again disturbed'.(4) The suspected ringleaders were arrested and held for trial. On the night of Tuesday, 8 November, there was in Nuneaton a general fear of violence from famishing single-hand weavers, and 200 windows were broken in the houses and business premises of the ribbon manufacturers; 250 special constables restored order. Later in the week six companies of the 21st Foot arrived in Coventry, en route from Ireland to Weedon: one company remained in Coventry barracks because of the disturbances but was not needed.(5) The burning of Beck's mill was followed by no similar acts, partly because it had such a beneficial effect on the weavers' cause.

At the Coventry Lent Assizes in March 1832 the accused were tried under a consolidating statute of 1827 which, among many other

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(1) The barracks stood just behind where the British Home Stores now is, about 400 yards from Beck's factory.
(2) C.R.O.: Box labelled 'Anti-machine riots, 1831': Serjeant Adams's brief, p. 4. P.R.O. H.O. 52/15, T. Morris to Melbourne, 8 November 1831. Coventry Herald, 11 November 1831.
(3) P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 221. See also Coventry Herald, loc. cit.
(4) P.R.O.: H.O. 40/29, Samuel Vale to Melbourne, 8 November1831.
(5) Memorandum Book of Disturbances at Nuneaton, ii, pp. 51 et seq. Coventry Herald, loc. cit.

provisions, made it a felony to destroy textiles in the course of manufacture or machinery used for their manufacture.(1) The statute declared riotous and tumultuous assembly leading to the destruction of buildings or machinery a capital felony(2) and it was riotous assembly leading to destruction of the machinery and factory that the accused were charged with.(3) They were Thomas Burbury, aged 22, Joseph Day, aged 23, John Deeming, aged 32, William Barton, aged 50, Benjamin Sparkes, aged 20, Alfred Toogood, aged 17, and William Westwick, aged 35.(4) The occupations of Barton and Toogood cannot be discovered; Sparkes was a whitesmith and the others were weavers.(5) Day, Deeming, and Westwick were found not guilty on the main charges; they entered into recognizances of £60 each, found two sureties of £30 each, and were discharged. Barton was also found not guilty on the main charges but was sentenced to nine months imprisonment for stealing two packets of moist sugar, a teapot and a ball of twine from Beck's house. The evidence against the others was damning. Burbury was the first to burst open the door of the loom-shop and his words to the men behind him were held to have instigated the arson. Toogood was seen to break machinery, as was Sparkes, who also pulled silk out of the looms, and held Beck while the crowd beat him. All three were found guilty and were sentenced to death, though the judge, Sir James Parke, told Toogood that in view of his youth he would recommend clemency to the Crown; this would no doubt be granted but he would certainly be transported. The jury had recommended mercy for all three: the judge showed none to Burbury and Sparkes. 'In passing sentence of death upon you I feel much reluctance, but I could not let it pass that in a great commercial city like this, such outrages on property could be tolerated; you are therefore to expect no mercy here.'(6)

Parke said this shortly after admitting that most probably Burbury had tried to save Beck himself from the violence of the mob. Burbury was plainly in at least one respect different from the other

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(1) 7 & 8 Geo. IV, cap. 30; An Act for consolidating and amending the Laws in England, relative to malicious injuries to Property, cl. 3.
(2) ibid., cl. 8.
(3) Coventry Herald, 30 March 1832.
(4) A Report of the Trial of the Prisoners charged with Rioting and Destroying the Machinery of Josiah Beck (Coventry, 1832), p. 1.
(5) Coventry Herald, 11 November 1831. A Report of the Trial, p. 3.
(6) Coventry Herald, 30 March, 1832.

rioters. The references to his good character that were given at the trial may have been as nugatory as the judge alleged. He alone among the prisoners is mentioned in the report of the trial as attending chapel - Whitefriars Lane chapel - but this may be fortuitous.(1) He was, however, the son of an army officer who had served on Wellington's staff, though this fact was not mentioned at his trial.(2) THough nothing is known of Burbury's early life, his role as a leader of the rioters is understandable. Yet it would be wrong to distinguish him sharply from the others. Before November 1831 none of the rioters, including Burbury, are mentioned in the sources: they were not active in the weavers' movement or politics; they did not speak at meetings. At their trial the possibility that their actions had in some way been organised by the respectable, official leaders of the weavers was not mentioned by the prosecution. Thus in one sense the burning was an act of 'folk violence' - a spontaneous, unconsidered attack on machinery regarded as a threat to the livelihood of handloom weavers: this is how Benjamin Poole himself described it; he could not really explain how the riot occured.(3) Yet in another sense it was a controlled, disciplined and moderate act. There was little looting and no violence committed to anyone but Beck; and the detailed story of the riot shows how several times the rioters did not take advantage of opportunities to kill him. Beck's experiences were unpleasant but he suffered no permanent injury. Incomparably less physical pain was inflicted than in the elections of 1826 or 1832, when the electorate at large committed less violence than it suffered at the hands of hired bullies engaged by the candidates' agents. For these offences no one was punished with more than a painless censure from a select committee. The law was more concerned to protedt property than persons, as is shown by the fact that Burbury's attempts to defend Beck did him no good at his trial. And, as the whole tenour of the judge's summing-up demonstrates, the law was concerned above all with the economically subversive nature of the crime, and the need to deter others with savage sentences, rather than with the value of the property destroyed. Beck himself valued the contents of his house at only £1734.18s.2d. and a local

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(1) Coventry Herald, 30 March 1832.

(2) G. Rude, 'Thomas Burbury', in Australian Dictionary of Biography, 1788-1850, i (Melbourne, 1966), pp. 178 et seq.

(3) P.P.: H.C. 678 (1831-32) xix, p. 57.

builder valued the premises at £690.9s.4d. Even these totals were doubtless inflated. A jury eventually found the damage to amount to £2,134.19s.4d.(1) It is arguable that they could not have exceeded by much the value of the clothes ripped up at the two elections. If Burbury, Sparkes and Toogood had been election bullies they would have been well paid for their rioting and would have suffered no more than an embarrassing examination by testy M.P.s. Electoral violence was unsubversive and licenced.

There was much sympathy for Burbury and Sparkes in Coventry. 'A feeling of unfeigned sorrow for the probable fate of the two unfortunate men condemned to die is manifest among all classes in the city ... and the most strenuous efforts are making to procure a remission of the sentence.'(2) Many signed a petition for mercy.(3) Preparations for the execution were made for 11 April, and the Coventry sheriffs feared that an attempt might be made to rescue them in the narrow streets that lay on the route from the gaol to Whitley Common. Major-General Campbell at Warwick sent his aide-de-camp to Coventry to see if the soldiers in the barracks - two troops of the 2nd Dragoons and one of the 14th Light Dragoons - were sufficient. The sheriffs thought that they were but said that they would let Campbell know immediately if they found that extra help was needed.(4) But in the event the sentences were commuted to transportation for life, owing to the influence of Ellice's pleas on their behalf. In May Burbury, Sparkes and Toogood left the gaol for Portsmouth, to begin their journey to Australia.(5)

The immediate result of the mill-burning was an improvement in the weavers' condition: this was one act of Luddism that paid off - indeed did so more effectively than all the argumentation and moral suasion that had preceded it. The benefit went further than Beck's unsurprising decision not to make any more ribbons by steam.(6) On 8 November, the day after the burning, the city

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(1) C.R.O.: Box labelled 'Anti-machine riots, 1831', estimates of property destroyed. Coventry Herald, 6 July 1832.

(2) A Report of the Trial, p. 8.

(3) Coventry Herald, 30 March 1832.

(4) P.R.O.: H.O. 52/20, John Ralphs and Thomas Pepper to Melbourne, 30 March 1832, H.O. 40/30, Campbell to S.M. Phillips, 3 April 1832.

(5) Coventry Herald, 13 April, 20 April, 11 May 1832.

(6) Coventry Herald, 2 December 1831.

manufacturers met at the Castle Inn and set to work to secure firm lists of prices. Weavers' representatives were invited to attend from all three branches of the trade - the Jacquard, the plain engine, and the single-hand - and with them the manufacturers drew up lists which were, with some trifling exceptions, re-enactments of the lists of 1829. All the manufacturers agreed to the lists, and - which was more important - agreed to set up a permanent committee of twenty manufacturers to watch over the lists of prices. The committee was to receive complaints from weavers about reductions, visit the manufacturers in question, and urge them to abide by the lists. Despite its lack of formal sanctions this aftermath of the Beck riot was a far more solid attempt to enforce the list than manufacturers had made previously - and was to be successful for over a year. Perhaps most significant of all was the agreement of John Day to pay in future by the piece, and not by the week.(1) The lists of prices of November 1831 mark an attempt to prevent for social reasons the full operation of market forces. One Coventry manufacturer, Cleophas Ratliff, claimed a few months later that the aim of the list was to give the poorest weavers a bare subsistence if they were fully employed: below that point they ought not to be allowed to drop. The list forced some manufacturers to pay wages higher than they would otherwise have done - but any lower level of wages would be pauperising.(2) The list had the effect, too, of reducing competition between masters: a feature which commended the agreement to the Coventry Herald, which thought that the list 'will induce every manufacturer to resort to some other means of success than that he can find in his own hardness of heart'.(3) It was praised for this reason by Joseph Marston, a Foleshill undertaker; he even implied that this was the motive for the introduction of the list.(4) But the coincidence between the burning of Beck's mill and the agreement is too great not to cause one to believe that the masters were impelled far more by fear of the weavers than by fear of each other.

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(1) Coventry Herald, 11 November 1831. P.P: H.C. 341 (1835) xiii: Report and Minutes of Evidence from the Select Committee on the Handloom Weavers, p. 267; [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 221 et seq; H.C. 678 (1831-32) xix, pp. 59 et seq, 75, 92, 105.

(2) P.P.: H.C. 678 (1831-32) xix, pp. 106 et seq.

(3) Coventry Herald, 11 November 1831.

(4) P.P.: H.C. 678 (1831-32) xix, pp. 75 et seq.

From November 1831 onwards weavers and masters turned from fighting each other to fighting the government, most M.P.s, and the conventional economic thought of the day: the industry set about attacking the 'free trade' in ribbons and campaigning for the restoration of prohibition. This had always been the prevailing desire in the trade: what marks the end of 1831 is a vast intensification of effort. The Castle Inn meeting of 8 November initiated a memorial to the Board of Trade, which was eventually signed by fifty-two manufacturers, asking for the restoration of prohibition. Memorials were also sent from the many inhabitants of Coventry who signed a petition circulated by the weavers, from the weavers and manufacturers of Nuneaton, and the weavers of Foleshill. The manufacturers' decision was connected with the agreement with the weavers they concluded at the same time; paying by the list of prices would help to make Warwickshire's ribbon industry even less competitive with France's, and it was logical, though scarcely optimistic, to attempt now to remove French competition altogether. 'A manufacturer' declared:

> My circumstances, like those of most of my neighbours, resemble the man imprisoned in an iron room, which became narrower every day, till at last it became his coffin and his tomb. The prisoner is a personification of my trade; the unanimous resolution of the meeting of manufacturers last week, calling for a memorial to the Board of Trade, is like the sound of trampling feet outside the prison.(1)

It was perhaps the same man who tried to convince the weavers in two circulars that all their miseries were attributable to free trade: that this was the reason why 'MEN HAVE BEEN LABOURING FOR EIGHTEEN PENCE TO TWO SHILLINGS PER WEEK!!!' Competition between masters and between masters and men was ignored; competition with France was alone blamed.(2) 'A manufacturer' was also the author of the anonymous letter to Lord Melbourne, in which the two circulars were enclosed: a letter in which it was suggested that unless the Board of Trade heeded the Coventry memorial some manufacturers would dismiss their weavers and that riot and disorder would then occur. 'My Lord can you predict what would be the result. I am no alarmist but on my conscience I cannot withhold my apprehensions from you. It is not for me to suggest what should

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(1) Coventry Herald, 18 November 1831. See also ibid., 11 November, 25 November, 2 December, 9 December, 23 December 1831 for this paragraph.

(2) P.R.O.: H.O. 40/29, A letter to the Weavers ... on the Ruinous Consequences of the Miscalled Free Trade System; Manufacturer's Second letter to the Weavers.

be your course': though in fact the implication was clear; Lord Melbourne should put pressure on the Board of Trade to reverse the free trade policy for the sake of public order.(1)

These were the tactics of desperation. Ellice and Bulwer were courteous to the deputation from the ribbon trade who were taking the memorial to the Board of Trade, but Ellice held out no hope for the memorial and would not be involved with it. Parliament would not reintroduce prohibition; smuggling could never be stopped anyway; and even if it could, how could prohibition help the single-hand-loom weaver, in competition not with France but with the engine-loom at home? In a letter to the weavers' committee he repeated his refusal to ask for prohibition and thought it practicable to press only for stricter measures to control smuggling. Bulwer thought prohibition 'unpopular' in the House of Commons and asked the weavers' committee to think again about asking for it; but if after further consideration the committee decided that they wanted still to press for prohibition he promised to help; he also undertook to ask for a select committee on the silk trade.(2) Eventually Bulwer and Lord Grosvenor moved for a select committee, Bulwer describing the distress in Coventry and the baneful effect of the preference for French fashion; French silks were preferred even in the remotest parts of Northumberland.(3) The committee met in the spring and produced 1,000 pages of evidence and no recommendations whatsoever. The energy which the Warwickshire ribbon trade expended in fighting for the committee and in giving evidence before it brought an emotional benefit but no material one.

'An Observer' wrote in the Coventry Herald about free trade in November 1831: 'To the people of Coventry I am sure that this subject is more important than Reform itself'.(4) This was no doubt so, and reflected at one level a more sensible appraisal of realities than the prattling of the Coventry Herald: 'A Reformed House of Commons will assuredly enact laws to feed the hungry, and that will for ever remove the present causes of our distress'.(5)

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(1) P.R.O.: H.O. 40/29.

(2) Coventry Herald, 25 November, 16 December 1831, 20 January, 3 February, 2 March, 13 July 1832. See also C.R.O.: Misc. Letters, Edward Ellice to W. Hickling, 25 January 1832, for a further refusal by Ellice to get involved.

(3) Coventry Herald, 9 March 1832. Parliamentary Debates, third series, x, pp. 992 et seq.

(4) Coventry Herald, 18 November 1831.

(5) ibid., 2 March 1832.

Yet in retrospect the labour of the ribbon trade for the reimposition of the prohibitory laws seems merely pathetic. Hatred of free trade united, for a time, masters and men: but a united city could not prevail against the great weight of opinion massed in opposition to it. 'We must recollect', said Ellice later, 'that Coventry is not the whole country'.(1) The years of the reform bill were years of deluded hope for those Coventrians who put their trust in peaceful methods for the alleviation of distress: success was gained only by the apolitical weavers who resorted to arson. Even this success was short-lived. The fragile unity of the classes which the burning had helped to create was soon broken. Soon after the reform procession had moved through the narrow streets of the city masters and men were once again ranging themselves against each other as the crisis in the ribbon trade continued.

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(1) ibid., 13 June 1834.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE END OF THE OLD CORPORATION AND THE PRESERVATION OF THE FREEMAN FRANCHISE

I

The Reform of the Old Corporation

One constant theme in the history of Coventry in the first half of the nineteenth century was the efforts of the city's freemen to defend their rights of property and privilege. In the 1820s an enemy against whom they had to be protected was the corporation, which had for years neglected scandalously the city charities, for freemen and citizens in general, for which it was the trustee. Soon after the 1826 election (in which corporation influence had been largely responsible for the defeat of the liberals Ellice and Moore) a group of dark blue, or anti-corporation and by this time liberal, men in the city founded the Blue Club to pay the admission fees of liberal freemen and to oppose the interference in elections and maladministration of the city charities by the corporation; Charles Lilly, Adie Cramp, William Browett, Charles Eyre, Peter Gregory, H.C. Lea, and John Hands were prominent in this club.(1) Their aims were shared by the journal closely associated with them - the Coventry Observer, founded by Edward Bromfield in 1827 in opposition to the Herald, which had abandoned its anti-corporation and liberal stand in the 1826 election and had opposed Ellice and Moore: owing to the fact

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(1) Coventry Observer, 29 November 1827, 7 February 1828, 19 November 1829. P.P.: H.C. 547 (1835) viii, p. 60.

that its proprietor, Henry Merridew, was the son of an alderman. Paradoxically, the Herald returned to an anti-corporation position just before the Observer began publication, and so for some years the two journals were taking the same line but attacking each other's sincerity in doing so - until in 1830 the Herald bought up the Observer, continuing to oppose the close corporation.(1)

But after about 1829 the campaign against the close corporation was less continuous and forceful. In 1830 the Blue Club, with its largely local focus of interest, was dissolved and replaced as the central liberal society by the political union, with its emphasis on national rather than municipal concerns:(2) and no doubt one cause of the decline in purely local controversy was that the issue of parliamentary reform tended to drive other matters from the political arena. But a more important reason was the reform of the close corporation by some leading members and the consequent removal of many of the abuses complained of by the dark blues. The clamour for reform seems to have had its first effects on the corporation in the autumn of 1827, at the Great Leet election for the 'charter officers'. The mayoral contest at least was unusually vigorous. One candidate, Alderman Whitwell, a surgeon and corporator of thirty years' standing, and though a dissenter and a 'Whig' a keen supporter of Fyler and Heathcote in 1826, had by some process now obscure become the leader of a reforming group. His Tory (and apparently anti-reforming) candidate was William Carter - a member of the clan with several representatives in high municipal office. The Tories engaged a professional agent - almost certainly John Carter. Electors in the tiny corporate constituency were bribed; £10 a vote was paid by the Tories. Carter won.(3)

But by the following summer the corporation under his leadership was taking the first steps towards reform, and the election of Whitwell as a more definitely reforming mayor was acclaimed by the Observer as a victory for Blue Club opinions. He was praised in terms which for that journal were almost fulsome: he was not

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(1) Coventry Herald, 21 September, 2 November 1827, 2 April, 17 September 1830, Coventry Observer, 11 October, 1 November, 27 December 1827, 31 January, 20 March, 30 October, 4 December 1828, 1 January, 30 October 1829, 25 March 1830. Another anti-corporation journal was the Freemen's Register, which ran for thirteen weeks in the spring of 1827. The copies in C.W.C. were destroyed in the Second World War and it cannot now be traced, but see S.E. Kerrison, 'Coventry and the Municipal Corporations Act, 1835' (Birmingham M.A. thesis, 1939), p. 47.

(2) P.P.: H.C. 547 (1835) viii, p. 63.

(3) Coventry Herald, 26 October 1827. Coventry Observer, 27 October, 1 November 1827.

'untinged with the faults of all corporators, still he is not deeply dyed in the corruptions of his fraternity'.(1) From then onwards till the dissolution of the close corporation in 1835 there was an unbroken succession of reforming mayors who were keenly supported by the other members of the council. T.S. Morris, an Anglican Tory ribbon manufacturer, was mayor from Whitwell's retirement in 1830 to 1832, R.K. Rotherham, an Anglican Tory watch manufacturer (and currently poor law reformer too) in 1832-1833, William Hawkes, a dissenting ribbon manufacturer and one of the few liberals in the corporation, in 1833-1834, and George Eld, the keenest reformer and ablest corporator of the day, from October 1834 to the end of the old corporation.(2) All these men save Eld, who entered the council in 1830,(3) had been members before 1828. There is no hint of any group actively opposed to reform after 1827, among either old or new corporators, but the reformers were undoubtedly assisted by the rapid change in the composition of the corporation at the time, owing to the death or retirement of old members: of the nineteen members in 1835, only seven had been corporators in 1828, when the council numbered seventeen. Eld himself contrasted the new corporation with the old; the new corporators 'have never stooped to palliate any acts of their predecessors, which have been proved to be either illegal or culpable'.(4)

The reforming corporation worked harder than its predecessors and expected its members to co-operate. A bye-law insisting on regular attendance was passed in March 1828. In 1832 it was decided to fine absentees 1s. for each meeting and in 1835 (when the efforts of all were needed to try to prevent the passing of the Municipal Corporations Bill) the fine was raised to 5s. if members had been specially summoned by the mayor. Regular absentees were severely treated: for example, in March 1833 a letter was sent to Alderman Hall to express regret at his absence and to remind him

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(1) Coventry Observer, 23 October 1828. Whitwell had first been mayor in 1800. He died in January 1831. Coventry Herald, 21 January 1831.

(2) Coventry Herald, 15 October, 22 October 1830, 7 October, 28 October 1831, 12 October, 26 October 1832, 25 October 1833, 24 October 1834. Coventry Mercury, 6 February 1836. Thomas Morris (not T.S. Morris) was another liberal corporator. West, op. cit., pp. 772 et seq.

(3) C.R.O.: Council Minutes 17, 2 November 1830.

(4) Coventry Herald, 8 May 1835. See Eld's letter in ibid, 15 May 1835, on the turnover in council membership in this period. The figures quoted above have been calculated from C.R.O.: Council Minutes, 16, (November 1826 to May 1830), and 18, (May 1833 to December 1835).

that a continuance of it would impose 'a painful duty' on the council. Some months later Hall resigned.(1) Rapid work was accomplished by setting up many more committees than had hitherto been usual. Committees of four or six members were set up, for example, to manage Ford's Hospital, to superintend the repair and redecoration of the dilapidated council room, to investigate sundry charity accounts, to inquire into the proper scales of market tolls and of salaries for corporation officials and the bills presented by the town clerk and his partner, Dewes, to superintend the reformation of the Free Grammar School, and - this was the last committee to be set up - 'to maintain the liberties, privileges and customs of this city and the charters of the same' when they were threatened by the Municipal Corporations bill in 1835; its four members were given a free hand in their task.(2) The most important committee was set up first in 1829, met weekly, and investigated the accounts of the corporation itself and of all the charities of which it was trustee; thus several other committees were subordinate to it. This rather complex structure seems not to have led to confusion: probably in part because the same men tended to serve on all the committees - the mayors already listed, both in and out of their periods of office (when in, they took the chair), and R.K.R. Rotherham's brother Thomas, E. Phillips, and Thomas Osmond. One name occurs more frequently than any other - that of George Eld, who seems to have dedicated his life to the reform of the corporation in the early 1830s, and to its preservation in 1835.(3)

Accounts for the corporation estate did not exist at all for the period 1770-1800. In the nineteenth century they had been resumed but were in a confused state. The accounts since 1822 had not been audited, and there were many debtors to the corporation. The receiver of the rents and revenues of the corporation was peremptorily ordered to produce his books for audit, arrears of rent were collected, a new system of accounting was introduced in

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(1) C.R.O.: Council Minutes, 16, 4 March 1828; 17, 21 November 1832, 12 March 1833; 18, 26 November 1833, 25 August 1835.

(2) C.R.O.: Council Minutes, 18, 9 June 1835.

(3) C.R.O.: Council Minutes, 16, 31 March, 6 May, 7 June 1829; 17, 1 June, 2 November, 7 December 1830, 5 April, 19 April 1831, 10 January, 31 January, 29 May, 26 July, 18 December 1832; 18, 27 August, 24 September 1833, 30 September 1834, 9 June 1835.

1831 which made clear (as had not been before) the precise object of each item of expenditure, the accounts from 1822 were audited, and the finance committee remained in being to regulate the corporate finances in future.(1) By the autumn of 1832 even the Coventry Herald could comment that 'confusion and irregularity have given place to simplicity and order; the accounts are under an excellent system of arrangement'.(2)

Order and system were brought into other aspects of the corporate administration. Upon the recommendation of the committee that had enquired into the market tolls and the salaries paid to corporation officers, certain market tolls that had been illegally charged for twenty years by the collectors were stopped, a moderate scale of charges was drawn up for market stall-holders and displayed to prevent extortion by the collectors (who were warned that future infractions could lead to prosecution and that they must submit full accounts for lettings), and many irregular fees and perquisites that had been exacted by corporation servants such as the town crier, the sword bearer, and the beadle, were forbidden; their salaries were increased in lieu. Also forbidden was the practice of the mayor's taking the product of the market tolls as a perquisite of office.(3) The accounts of the mayor from 1811 onwards were unaudited: they were investigated by a committee, with full legal powers to recover money owing to the corporation. The town clerk and his partner as solicitor were warned not to continue their habit of submitting late their bills for legal work undertaken for the corporation: in future they would not be considered after two years.(4) One key corporation post was filled with a more competent man: the egregious Goodall, the chief constable responsible for organising much of the bullying during the election of 1826, departed; the mayor wrote to the Home Secretary to recommend a successor, and as a result Thomas Prosser, inspector at C Division of the Metropolitan Police, was appointed chief constable.(5)

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(1) C.R.O.: Council Minutes, 16, 5 May 1830; 17, 7 February, 18 December 1832. P.P.: H.C. 606 (1834) xxii, p. 116. The Report of the Municipal Commissioners on ... Coventry, pp. 36 et seq. No accounts of the corporation between 1733 and 1836 are in the C.R.O.
(2) Coventry Herald, 26 October 1832.
(3) C.R.O.: Council Minutes, 17, 9 June, 26 June 1832; 29 January 1833; 18, 21 May 1833.
(4) C.R.O.: Council Minutes, 18, 27 August, 10 September, 24 September 1833.
(5) ibid., 17, 7 August, 4 September, 25 September 1832. Coventry Herald, 28 September 1832.

Constables of a better quality were thereafter appointed.(1)

The most noticeable aspect of the corporation's new attitude was its abstention from electoral interference after 1826 and indeed its vigorous efforts to keep the peace at them: a change of front presumably owing much to the parliamentary censure of its activities in 1826, and declared by the corporation by June 1828, before Whitwell's election.(2) The corporation adhered to its promise at the parliamentary elections of 1830 and afterwards. There was an associated change; the corporation ceased to some extent to use the charitable gifts at its disposal to reward Tory voters. The fund especially in question here was the £4 gift of Sir Thomas White's charity, distributed each Whitsuntide to needy freemen nominated by the alderman for each of the ten ancient wards.(3) Of the poor freemen who received the gift at Whitsuntide 1827 147 had voted for Fyler and only 11 for Ellice. In 1828 131 Fyler men and 22 Elliceites received it. Thereafter the proportions usually changed somewhat: 112 Fyler, and 50 Ellice electors received the gift in 1829, and 104 Fyler and 56 Ellice in 1830; in the following year 131 Fyler men and only 37 Ellice men received it, but in 1832 the corresponding figures were 89 and 67. In 1833, the last year for which these details are available, 105 supporters of Thomas at the election of November 1832 were given the £4 alms and 49 supporters of Ellice.(4) Some members of

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(1) The Report of the Municipal Commissioners on ... Coventry, p. 92.

(2) Coventry Observer, 26 June 1828.

(3) P.P.: H.C. 606 (1834) xxii; 28th Report of the Charity Commissioners, p. 191.

(4) These figures are taken from marginal notes at the entries referring to the annual distributions in C.R.O., Council Minutes, 16, 12 June 1827, 3 June 1828, 16 June 1829; 17, 8 June 1830, 31 May 1831, 19 June 1832; 18, 4 June 1833. They were compiled by Richard Marriott, radical solicitor, and leading witness to the municipal enquiry commissioners in 1833. For the intense mutual hatred of Marriott and John Carter, see the marginal MS notes by Carter in his copy of The Report of the Municipal Commissioners on ... Coventry (Coventry, 1835) passim, now in C.R.O. Marriott had served as a clerk in Carter's office.

the corporation continued to turn away liberal candidates for the gift: in 1833 Alderman Phillips told one that he ought to apply to Ellice and Bulwer for his £4, and Alderman Clarke told another that Tory freemen came first. But even the municipal enquiry commissioners agreed that the partiality was considerably less than it had been in the mid-1820s.(1) And most significant, as an indication of the corporation's policy, was its decision in May 1831 that no freeman should receive the gift more often than once every ten years: which meant in effect that in each decade each eligible freeman would receive one gift: partiality would naturally be eliminated.(2)

This change was only a small part of the corporation's most important achievement in these years: reforming drastically the administration of the charities in its trust. From 1770 to 1828 all the monies due to Sir Thomas White's charity had been paid to John Clarke (sometime alderman) or to his father during Clarke's absence from Coventry. Annual accounts were delivered to the corporation, but they were incomplete and many were unaudited. When John Clarke died in September 1828 the corporation asked Richard Dewes (John Carter's partner) to investigate. He discovered after much labour that Clarke had retained almost £3000 of trust monies in his own hands, and had merely paid over some money occasionally to the corporation when it was wanted for the loan or gift funds.(3) In August 1829 Carter was instructed to meet the executors of Alderman Clarke to demand the money.(4) Two years later it still had not been paid: a peremptory demand was sent.(5) Eventually, the corporation had to settle for a payment of £60 - two per cent of the debt; the corporation had to borrow on bond to raise the money they owed, as trustees, to the other towns participating in the charity.(6) Meanwhile, after Clarke's death (and before Whitwell was appointed mayor) the corporation,

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(1) The Report of the Municipal Commissioners on ... Coventry, p. 86.

(2) C.R.O.: Council Minutes, 17, 31 May 1831. P.P.: H.C. 606 (1834) xxii, p. 191.

(3) P.P.: H.C. 606 (1834) xxii, p. 188.

(4) C.R.O.: Council Minutes, 16, 18 August 1829.

(5) ibid., 17, 2 August 1831.

(6) P.P.: H.C. 606 (1834) xxii, pp. 188 et seq.

on appointing Samuel Vale jr. as receiver of the White monies, had extracted a large surety from him and insisted that accounts be submitted thrice yearly and that all payments should be made into Bunney's bank, which was appointed treasurer of the charity.(1)

Dewes's investigations revealed that Edward Inge, town clerk from 1779 to 1812, and in that capacity responsible for the disbursement of the £50 loan monies from the White charity, had failed to submit accounts for them.(2) Carter and Dewes were ordered to demand them from the very aged Inge in April 1829, and four months later he was warned that proceedings would be taken against him unless he submitted them in a fortnight. In February 1830 he was given a last opportunity: one month later proceedings were begun.(3) Inge did not answer the bill filed against him in the Court of Exchequer: in January 1831 an attachment was filed against him. Accounts were at last submitted, but were found to be so incomplete that it was impossible to learn from them how much Inge owed. The attachment was pressed. By May 1832 Inge had paid £3,485 in settlement, and also the costs of the action.(4) The loan fund was now in the charge of Dewes, who according to the charity commissioners (and even the municipal enquiry commissioners) managed it properly. And since some £50 loans had gone, not to the freemen who were entitled to them but to others who had stood surety for them, the corporation decided in 1833 on Eld's recommendation that in future all sureties should be required to declare that they had no interest in the loan; in addition, three sureties were in future to be required, instead of one, to protect even further the integrity of the fund.(5)

The town clerk's brother, Samuel Carter (who was also gaoler) was bailiff or receiver of several smaller charities: Greyfriars Hospital (an almshouse), Jesson's and Collins's (for the support of apprentices), and Crow's (for the support of widows and the poor).

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(1) C.R.O.: Council Minutes, 16, 19 September 1828.

(2) P.P.: H.C. 606 (1834) xxii, p. 190.

(3) C.R.O.: Council Minutes, 16, 22 April, 1 September 1829, 23 February, 17 March 1830.

(4) ibid., 17, 6 January, 19 April 1831, 8 May 1832. Inge received no help from Carter (his old partner) in his attempts to prepare these accounts, owing to Carter's laziness. See Inge's letter to Carter, 14 November 1830: 'Your engagements tho' confined to your sofa, are of that nature, as to deprive me of your assistance in any shape. I despair of ever making out the credit side of the Corporation Account and indeed I despair of your aid in making out any acct. relating to ourselves.' C.R.O: Doggett Collection, Letters of John Carter (uncatalogued).

(5) P.P.: H.C.606 (1834) xxii, pp. 189 et seq. The Report of the Municipal Commissioners on ... Coventry, pp. 51 et seq. C.R.O. Council Minutes, 17, 12 February 1833.

After many years during which he had not been closely superintended by the corporation Samuel Carter's management was brought under close scrutiny in 1827: it was then found that he owed a considerable amount to the Greyfriars account. He was required to give sureties and to pay off his debt. A committee of the corporation investigated in more detail the finances of the charities in his care from 1830 onwards: it found that he had kept their accounts badly and owed some £1300 to them (despite the payment of over £600 since 1827); in addition, property tax of more than £160 had not been paid. Carter resigned in 1831, and was replaced as receiver by Samuel Vale jr. (who was required to give a large surety). The debt was recovered from Samuel Carter and his surety at £100 a quarter from July 1832 onwards, and Carter resigned from the corporation.(1) Where other charities were concerned the corporation had for the most part to reform negligence rather than corruption.(2) Intricate confusions were disentangled, separate books of account prepared for each charity in the corporation's care, new and stricter rules of accounting enforced on the receivers and clerks of the charities, and partiality in their distribution at any rate partly precluded by new rules that corporation servants were not to enjoy them during their periods of office, and that candidates could not be considered merely by individual councillors; nobody would be considered unless his name had been submitted by regular notice to the corporation at least seven days in advance of the appropriate meeting. The chief credit for this laborious work from 1828 onwards was given by the charity commissioners in 1833 to Richard Dewes and George Eld: the commissioners recorded that the corporation had co-operated with them, and that they had no doubt that the charities would be well administered in future.(3)

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(1) C.R.O.: Council Minutes, 17, 1 June 1830, 1 February, 5 July, 26 July, 1831, 31 January, 13 March, 1 May, 3 July, 30 October 1832. P.P.: H.C. 606 (1834) xxii, pp. 170 et seq, 216, 231 et seq.

(2) These other charities were Bond's Hospital, Bablake Boys' Hospital, and Wheatley's, Lane's, Jelliff's, Davenport's and Wheate's charities.

(3) C.R.O.: Council Minutes, 17, 1 March 1831, 7 February, 28 February, 1 May, 9 June, 12 June, 19 June, 30 October 1832; 19 March 1833; 18, 30 September 1834, 27 May 1835. P.P.: H.C. 606 (1834) xxii, pp. 116, 133 et seq, 220 et seq. A marginal MS note by George Eld's daughter in the C.W.C. copy of this parliamentary paper gives the only extant clue as to Eld's motives in this work: he undertook it from the fear that otherwise the charities would be expropriated by a Whig government.

Samuel Carter was also bailiff from 1806 to 1831 of the estates that formed the endowment of the Free Grammar School in Hales Street: estates which yielded about £800 a year, which Carter paid to the headmaster and usher in the proportion of two to one. This income was in addition to their stipends as rector and lecturer of St. John's church. For some years after the appointment of the headmaster, the Rev. William Brooks, in 1779, he had been educating some sixty boys, but had quarrelled with the usher, Paris, on his appointment in 1794 and did not speak to him or enter the school thereafter; a decline in the number of pupils resulted and by the 1820s there were only ten and by 1833 only one. No register was kept and the library was in a state of squalid confusion. By 1830 Brooks was seventy-nine. Thus the faults committed by Carter as bailiff were only part of the troubles with which the reforming corporation had to deal as trustee of the Free Grammar School.(1)

Carter resigned as bailiff of the rents of the school when he gave up his posts with other charities, at Lady Day 1831. He then owed Brooks and Paris their proportion of the rents from 1829 to 1831. The debt was settled slowly.(2) Meanwhile, a detailed plan for the school had been worked out since 1830 by a committee of the corporation. In February 1832 its leading member, Eld, presented it. Its aim was to reform the ancient character of the school as a foundation to provide boys with a largely classical education up to university entrance. It set out to achieve this by specifying the duties and the terms and hours of attendance in detail for boys and staff, ordering the main principles of the curriculum, and placing the boys and usher clearly under the authority of the headmaster, and the headmaster and the usher even more clearly under the authority of the mayor and corporation, who could dismiss them in case of default or negligence.(3) These new rules shocked Brooks: Drs Bourne and Troughton told the corporation grammar school committee that any attempt to enforce them would endanger the precarious health of the octogenarian headmaster. Delay in their imposition was therefore accepted: but

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(1) P.P.: H.C. 606 (1834) xxii, pp. 127 et seq.

(2) ibid., p. 129.

(3) C.R.O.: Council Minutes, 17, 7 December 1830, 10 January, 17 January 1832. Coventry Herald, 17 February 1832. Eld also catalogued the 400 books in the Free Grammar School library; this catalogue is now in C.R.O.

this did not prevent the corporation from withholding payment of the product of the school estate's rents from Brooks and Paris (save for £60 to the latter) - and paying them into Bunney's bank instead - on the ground that rule 13, ordering the headmaster to submit a proper school register, had not been obeyed.(1)

Soon after, the corporation began negotiations with Brooks and Paris for their resignations. The Charity Commissioners arrived in the city during their course and expressed approval of the corporation's attitude. Brooks died while the negotiations were in progress, in October 1833. Paris remained in dispute with the corporation over the terms of his pension, and over the related question of the withholding of the greater part of his emoluments. He began a Chancery action against the corporation. In the summer of 1833 he canvassed the elementary schools of the city for scholars, succeeded in getting some seventy for the autumn term, drew up rules of his own, engaged his son as assistant master, and defied the Charity Commissioners or the corporation to eject him.(2) The corporation had the teaching of the two Parises inspected by two assistant masters from Rugby School - Buchold and James Prince Lee - who found it abysmally bad. Soon after the new headmaster, the Rev. Thomas Sheepshanks, took up his duties in August 1834, he ejected the younger Paris from the classroom by force of personality; the corporation ordered him not to enter the school again. Counsel's opinion was sought on the legality of the elder Paris's conduct, and Eld wrote to the bishop to mediate in the dispute. This move was apparently successful: Paris seems to have gone quietly in 1835. By the time that the old corporation was dissolved the school had settled down; there were some forty pupils (some of those admitted by Paris having apparently been ejected) and extensions were being built.(3)

This reform of the old corporation was admitted by the Coventry Herald and in part even by the municipal corporation commissioners.

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(1) C.R.O.: Council Minutes, 17, 29 May, 10 July, 4 September 1832.

(2) C.R.O.: Council Minutes, 17, 26 March 1833; 18, 15 October 1833. Coventry Herald, 22 March, 19 July, 26 July 1833; P.P.: H.C. 606 (1834) xxii, p. 130.

(3) C.R.O.: Council Minutes, 18, 11 February, 26 July, 28 October, 4 November, 2 December 1834; 5 May, 2 June, 8 December 1835. Coventry Herald, 8 August 1834. The corporation had been careful to advertise the headmastership, prohibited canvassing, and chose Sheepshanks from fifty applicants. He came from the headmastership of St. Peter's School, Pimlico. ibid., 24 January 1834. C.R.O.: Council Minutes, 17, 26 March 1833; 18, 11 February 1834.

It led to 'a gradual revival of the public confidence to a considerable extent'.(1) There still remained a strong opposition to it in the city.(2) There was dislike of the very high county rate (for the county of the city of Coventry) which was fixed by the justices of the peace for the county - in other words the ten aldermen, or the nucleus of the city corporation under another title. The county rate went up to 24s. in the early 1830s because of the cost of the new county gaol in Pepper Lane:(3) the contract for the building was put out to tender by public advertisement and was won by a firm from Leicester - so there was no suggestion of corruption - but the county ratepayers' association that was formed in 1832 argued strongly that the gaol was unnecessary; Warwick gaol would have served.(4) And though by the early 1830s the

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(1) The Report of the Municipal Commissioners on ... Coventry, p. 92. See also Coventry Herald, 2 August, 4 October 1833, for leading articles to the effect that considerable reforms had been carried out. The local reports of the Municipal Corporation Commissioners are of course generally recognised as partial and biased: see G.B.A.M. Finlayson, 'The Municipal Corporation Commission and Report, 1833-35', Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research, xxxvi (1963), pp. 49 et seq. In the case of Coventry the commissioners grossly understated the extent to which reform had taken place by the time of their coming in 1833. As regards the Free Grammar School, for example, it lists extensively the iniquities of the staff and says, quite untruthfully, that 'up to the time of our enquiry, the corporation never took any steps to correct the maladministration of the school, beyond occasionally speaking to the masters'. The Report of the Municipal Commissioners on ... Coventry, pp. 53 et seq. P.P.: The 28th Report of the Charity Commissioners H.C. 606 (1834) xxii, is much more balanced in its account of the work of the corporation from 1828 onwards. S.E. Kerrison, 'Coventry and the Municipal Corporations Act, 1835' (Birmingham M.A. thesis, 1939) is a detailed but somewhat inaccurate attempt to vindicate the record of the old corporation.

(2) See the letters of Junius etc. in Coventry Herald, 2 November 1832, 1 February 1833 and the account of the meeting in the Anchor tavern, addressed by William Browett and Richard Marriott, which called for the investigation of the city by the municipal commissioners: ibid., 1 March 1833.

(3) The Gulson Central Library now stands on the site.

(4) Coventry Herald, 27 April, 17 August, 24 August, 26 October 1832. The Report of the Municipal Commissioners on ... Coventry, pp. 27 et seq, 90 et seq.

city's own accounts were properly kept and there was no suggestion of corruption, the corporation continued to spend large sums of money on private luxury: and in particular on the dinner for some 190 corporators and their guests, held every October after the Great Leet (as it had been uninterruptedly since 1347). Over £2000 was spent in this way in 1830, 1831, and 1832. The custom did not cease until 1833, when the municipal corporation commissioners were actually in the city. As the Herald ironically put it: 'These are indeed "the times of reformation"'(1) The attitude of the corporation on this matter was well expressed by Charles Woodcock at a dinner given for Ellice at Draper's Hall in 1835: when Ellice denounced the cost of civic entertainment, Woodcock called out that 'it was not public money': it came not from rates but from the rents of the corporate estate. There were counter-cries of 'He's mad'.(2) Similarly, the corporation insisted on continuing to employ John Carter in the several offices he performed inefficiently: which helps to explain the leading part in the movement against the old corporation of Richard Marriott and John Royle, solicitors. 'All I want', said Royle, 'is that the grievous monopoly Mr. Carter enjoys, should be thrown open to the profession'. (3)

The close corporation consisted almost entirely of Tories, opposed to the Great Reform Bill.(4) They went out of their way to antagonise liberals. At the height of the Reform Bill crisis of 1831 Richard Marriott and Thomas Goode argued at a meeting that the Marquis of Hertford was quite unfit to hold the honorific office of recorder - partly because he had never taken the oaths of office or even visited the city, but mainly because he had voted against the reform bill. Nevertheless, the Great Leet insisted on re-electing Hertford. 'Three dreadful groans were then raised

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(1) Coventry Herald, 22 October 1830, 28 October 1831, 26 October 1832, 25 October 1833. The Report of the Municipal Commissioners on ... Coventry, pp. 33 et seq.

(2) Coventry Herald, 24 April 1835.

(3) ibid., 26 October 1832. Marriott was the 'solicitor of the town' who supplied the municipal corporation commissioners with much of their evidence against the old corporation: see John Carter's MS notes in his copy of their report (now in C.R.O.). The dismissal of John Carter and the sale of the corporation plate (at ridiculously low prices) were the first acts of the new corporation in 1836. Coventry Herald, 8 January 1836. C.W.C.: Coventry Miscellany (a bound collection of pamphlets), i, p. 256, Catalogue of Corporation Property Auctioned in July 1836.

(4) Coventry Herald, 18 October 1833.

for the Marquis of Hertford and the Boroughmongers.'(1) A few years later the corporation gratuitously antagonised Thomas Banbury, a liberal but not an active opponent of the old corporation, by choosing him as chamberlain - a post which entitled him to take a 1d. for every unlawful horse or cow on the common lands and which Banbury, a leading plush manufacturer, regarded as beneath his dignity. The corporation declined to accept the £20 fine he offered instead and sought to compel him to take up the post by legal action. The court of King's Bench found against Banbury, who agreed to serve in May 1835. Much of John Carter's time was taken up with this affair when the threat of dissolution itself hung over the close corporation.(2)

Above all, there was the natural feeling in the city that the only permanent guarantee of efficient administration was popular control through elections; without it, men of different temperament from Eld and company might overturn the reforms they had effected. As it was, the public were not even admitted to the meetings of the corporation, whose proceedings were not reported in detail in the press.(3) As the Coventry Herald put it in 1833 - after admitting the reforms that had occurred:

> There is nothing much worse than irresponsible power, and a self-elected body will inevitably do wrong. Negligence will certainly produce error, and one fault leads to others, the system imperceptibly becomes bad, and it continues to get so much worse, that an individual who may be newly introduced finds the labour of correction beyond his strength.(4)

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(1) Coventry Herald, 28 October 1831. The CPU, addressed by Marriott, Benjamin Poole, and the Goode brothers, decided a few days later to protest against the corporation's action in appointing as recorder 'a noble and anti-Reforming cormorant'. ibid., 4 November 1831.

(2) C.R.O.: Council Minutes, 18, 23 October, 4 November, 20 November 1834, 3 February 1835. Bodleian Library: MSS Top. Warwicks C.4 (MS of William Reader), f. 179. Coventry Herald, 28 November 1834, 29 May 1835.

(3) The magistrates (that is, the ten aldermen) had decided to admit reporters to the petty sessions in 1828; but corporation proceedings remained closed. Coventry Observer, 27 November 1828.

(4) Coventry Herald, 27 September 1833. See also The Report of the Municipal Commissioners on ... Coventry, pp. 92 et seq.

II

Coventry and the Municipal Corporations Act: the Freeman Franchise

The municipal corporations bill was published in June 1835. It proposed that the functions of the close corporations (including the control of charities) should be taken over by town councils elected for three years (one-third departing annually) by house-holders who had paid rates for three years; and that all the modes of acquiring the freedom of a corporation were to be abolished. The rights and privileges of existing freemen were to be preserved for their lifetimes, but eventually the clan of freemen and the peculiar privileges they had (such as the Lammas land grazing right, and the parliamentary franchise) would die out.(1) Coventry

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(1) The bill is printed in P.P. H.C. (1835) i. Clause 9 laid down that after the passing of the act no person was to be elected, admitted or enrolled a citizen, freeman, liveryman or burgess of any borough, 'in respect of any right or title other than by occupancy and payment of rates within such borough'. This common burgess right would confer the municipal but not, of course, the parliamentary franchise. This is not mentioned in the bill, but the number of freemen entitled to it would gradually have fallen as a result of the clause. Clause 10 deprived all those who were not freemen etc. on 5 June 1835 of all peculiar privileges with respect to real and financial property; such property was eventually to become part of the borough fund and thus enjoyed by the inhabitants at large. Those already privileged were, however, to continue to enjoy their rights for their lifetime. The clause was badly drafted. It seems to have been intended that the surplus of monetary privileges should gradually be paid into the borough fund as the numbers of freemen entitled to it fell. This would have been a relatively simple matter where individual entitlements were fixed, as in the case of the £4 gift in Coventry. But the clause does not make clear what was to happen in the case of corporate privilege not clearly divisible into individual shares, as, for example, the Lammas lands: it does not make clear whether the lands were to stay commonable until the last freeman had died, or were gradually to be reduced in area. From the first, government spokesmen made clear their belief that freemen were an integral part of the system of corruption and exclusive privilege at whose apex were the corporations. Even worse than the narrow close corporation, said Russell at the first reading, was the abuse 'which connects a few persons carrying on the Government for their own benefit with a portion of the lower class of the people belonging to the town, whose votes they buy, and whose habits they demoralise'. Coventry, Northampton and Leicester were singled out as examples of the 'grossest and most notorious abuses' committed by corporations manipulating charities in this way. Parliamentary Debates, third series, xxviii (1835), pp. 544 et seq.

corporation declared its entire opposition to the proposed change and took extraordinary measures to fight it - appointing George Eld, Osmond, R.K. Rotherham and John Carter a committee to 'maintain the liberties, privileges and customs of this city and the character of the same', and giving them virtual carte blanche to do so - thus allowing them the use of the common seal of the corporation.(1) At the same time the corporation decided to attempt to arouse opinion in the city on the only clause where widespread opposition to the bill might be expected - clause nine; an advertisement pointing out that under the bill the 'franchise of freemen shall absolutely expire ... after the present race of freemen is extinct' was to be inserted in the newspapers.(2)

George Eld and the Tory solicitor Charles Woodcock soon afterwards published two handbills pressing for the retention of freemen's rights, and at the same time a public meeting was held on the question in the County Hall. Woodcock's partner, Twist, took the chair. The meeting lasted for five hours. Charles Woodcock said that if the freeman parliamentary franchise were lost he would prefer universal suffrage to the £10 householders, or any other limited constituency. Isaac Johnson, a Tory weaver who had supported Fyler in the 1830 election, argued that the act would have the effect, by gradually ending the body of freemen, of ending their peculiar privileges and diverting to general use property which had been left to them. John Steane, another Fyler supporter, agreed with him, and moved that the meeting petition against the ninth clause. His motion was seconded by the radical leader William Taunton: 'It was only an attempt on the part of the Whigs, to do that secretly, which they dare not do openly: they wished to stand upon the middle classes, and to destroy the poor'.(3) The radical John Hands agreed with him. The radical David Buckney found it hard to make up his mind but thought that on balance the bill should be supported. William Browett and Joseph Taylor, other radicals, were more forthright and thought that the whole purpose of the meeting - to bring the city's liberal M.P.s into collision with the government over the bill - was bad. But despite their appeal for liberal unity the motion for petition was passed: a striking demonstration not only of the freemen's loyalty

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(1) C.R.O.: Council Minutes, 18, 9 June 1835.

(2) loc. cit.

(3) Coventry Herald, 26 June 1835.

to their caste but also of how far radical freemen had become disillusioned with the Whigs since 1832.(1) Within a few days the petition had been signed by 1956 freemen. Some pro-government radicals organised a meeting of support for the bill in the Craven Arms. George Baddeley, Thomas Goode, David Buckney and T. Perkins moved a resolution approving the bill on condition that it was amended to preserve the inchoate rights of apprentices already bound. This was carried amidst uproar from Tory operatives. The petition that Baddeley's group promoted attracted 2596 signatures but also 6999 counter-signatures - more, as the Herald sourly pointed out - than the adult male population of the city.(2)

In the Commons the 'basically reforming principle of the bill' was generally accepted.(3) The truncation of the freemen's rights, however, aroused great controversy - certainly far more than any other part of the bill.(4) The battle began when Russell moved on 22 June that the House should go into committee on the bill. Winthrop Praed and Sir Matthew White Ridley moved that the rights and privileges of freemen, and the ways in which they were created, should be preserved. Lords Stanley and Sandon, George Robinson, and of course Colonel Sibthorp, supported them. They argued that the freeman franchise had been guaranteed by the Reform Bill and that it was dishonest now to abrogate it 'by a side-wind', as Robinson put it; he added that in general he supported the bill.(5) Sibthorp did not, and was even more indignant at the attack on 'freemen, who, although they might not be the possessors of confiscated Church property, or proprietors of stalls in Covent-garden, were yet perhaps as independent, and as respectable as the noble Lord himself'.(6) Russell raplied that the freeman franchise had

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(1) loc. cit. Ellice refused to support the petition: he did not wish to see 'the establishment of separate interests and exclusive rights'. He also looked forward to the enclosure of the Lammas lands, as an eventual result of clause 10. Williams backed the petition. See also Ellice's letter to John Carter, 25 June 1835, refusing to oppose the bill: C.R.O.: Doggett Collection; Letters of John Carter.

(2) Coventry Herald, 26 June, 10 July, 17 July, 14 August 1835. C.R.O.: Letters on Municipal Reform, Osmond to Eld, 8 August, 21 August 1835.

(3) G.B.A.M. Finlayson, 'The Politics of Municipal Reform, 1835', English Historical Review, lxxxi (1966), p. 682.

(4) See ibid., pp. 680 et seq on this point.

(5) Parliamentary Debates, third series, xxviii (1835), pp. 1000 et seq, 1009 et seq, 1012 et seq. All these speakers save Stanley sat for freeman boroughs.

(6) ibid., p. 1009.

been kept in the Reform Bill only reluctantly and that their existence 'led to the grossest bribery and corruption'.(1)

The resolution was withdrawn, but these themes were taken up again in a more extended battle over the ninth clause the following day. The Attorney-General argued that in view of the venality and degraded occupations of freemen the government had been kind in not sweeping away the privileges of existing freemen. Electoral corruption had started with them, their example depraved others, and until they were disfranchised elections would not be pure.

> He would contend that the existence of freemen in corporations ... was an usurpation, that the system as it now stood was a curse to the country, and the sooner they were got rid of the better ... [They were usually] mean, wretched, beggarly and exceptionable individuals ... In a majority of cases they paid no rates - had no property - did not even discharge scot or bear lot - and the time of many of them was passed in workhouses the greater part of the year, whence they were withdrawn on the approach of an election Municipal or Parliamentary, for the purpose of giving their vote for a bribe of some description or other.(2)

Russell agreed, singling out Coventry as proof of the degradation that freemen helped to cause. Daniel O'Connell and the radicals Charles Buller and Daniel W. Harvey approved the clause - though the last defended the freemen of Colchester, his old constituency, from the government's generalised abuse, and thought that one justification for depriving poor men of an exclusive parliamentary franchise was that the demand for a much wider general suffrage would be all the greater. Harvey's hope was Sir James Graham's fear: though he favoured the bill in general, he felt that it would be dangerous to abridge rights confirmed by the Reform Bill, and underhand to do so by a 'side-wind'. The dishonesty of the 'side-wind', the honesty of the freemen (or, at least, their lack of exceptional venality as compared to other classes of voter) and the danger to other property rights if their franchise were eroded were arguments used by other speakers - Arthur Trevor, John Fielden, William Follett, Charles Barclay, Lords Sandon and Stanley, George Robinson, Captain C.F. Berkeley and Colonel Sibthorp, who registered the 'astonishment and disgust' with which he heard the Attorney-General.(3) Unlike Sibthorp, William Williams (member for Coventry) favoured the bill, but he attacked the ninth

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(1) ibid., pp. 1005 et seq.

(2) ibid., pp. 1076 et seq.

(3) ibid., pp. 1066 et seq, 1080 et seq, 1089 et seq. Barclay and Lord Stanley sat for county seats, Fielden and Berkeley for Oldham and Cheltenham, and the others for freeman boroughs.

clause. By the Reform Bill 'the rights and privileges of freemen had been preserved and maintained, and of that body of the city he had the honour to represent he would state, that a more virtuous constituency did not exist.in the country (No! No!)'. As to the alleged lowly status of the freeman, 'did not the man, by the very circumstance of applying so much time to acquire an art, place himself in the situation to become an independent man, and might he not have as much independence both of character, as any of the richer class of the community?'(1) In the event an amendment that would have continued the enrolment of freemen (and thus would also have preserved the franchise for future generations) was narrowly defeated, after a lengthy debate, by 278 votes to 232. Williams voted in the minority, Ellice (who did not speak in the debate) in the majority.(2)

Russell gave a slight amount of ground two days later, in a similar protracted debate in committee over clause 10.(3) In the bill recommitted in the middle of July to accommodate all the amendments scheduled for the report stage the government conceded the case that had been made for the preservation of the inchoate

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(1) ibid., pp. 1086 et seq.

(2) ibid., pp. 1112 et seq. Journals of the House of Commons, xc (1835), p. 374. Arthur Trevor spoke angrily, amidst scenes of confusion and uproar, at the question being put that the clause stand part of the bill. 'All he could say was, that if the clause passed the Committee, there was an end to all security for property, and the success of that Clause would constitute that House the executioners of fraud and violence (Uproar).' Parliamentary Debates, third series, xxviii (1835), pp. 1116 et seq.

(3) Russell was pressed by many members to confirm the inchoate pecuniary and property rights of apprentices already bound, and of the existing sons and daughters of freemen. Sir Robert Peel argued for these hard cases though he accepted the general principle of the clause, that eventually property should benefit the commonalty as a whole. Sibthorp argued that the result of the clause would be 'that we should be told, at some day not very distant, that our estates should be confiscated, because the noble lord willed it, and that they should be given to a multitude of banditti who were all ready to take them'. Parliamentary Debates, third series, xxviii, p. 1183. Other members also argued that the abrogation of freemen's privileges set a dangerous precedent for the property of higher orders. Russell agreed to think again but in the meantime would accept only an amendment preserving the inchoate rights of apprentices - on the grounds that they were a special case, having laid out hard cash in the expectation of advantages to come. ibid., pp. 1181 et seq. Journals of the House of Commons, xc (1835), p. 379.

pecuniary and property rights, while maintaining the essential principle that freemen's corporate property would in due course be enjoyed by all inhabitants of their boroughs.(1) And the clause which prevented the enrolment of new freemen was preserved. When this clause - 11 - was considered by a committee of the whole house an amendment that would have preserved the parliamentary franchise for men who in future served apprenticeships or were the sons of freemen by birth - the two classes that had under the reform bill kept their freeman franchise - was defeated by 262 votes to 234.(2) A second amendment that would have preserved the franchise for apprentices already bound and sons already born, was also lost, by 234 votes to 203.(3)

At the third reading on 20 July Sir Richard Vyvyan, member for Bristol, presented a petition against the entire bill from the corporation of Coventry, and attacked the bill as an attempt at spoliation.(4) Russell had his answer ready.

> If he wanted further proof of the soundness of this Bill he should find it in the fact that a petition had been presented from the city of Coventry, of an entirely opposite nature from the one now presented by the hon. Baronet from that city, and the petition he alluded to was signed by 2,600 householders and freemen, praying that, with the exception of one particular part of the Bill relating to apprenticeships, the House would pass the Bill.(5)

The bill passed the Commons on 20 July amended in many points of detail but not in essential principle.(6)

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(1) Clause 12 of the recommitted bill maintained these rights in respect of men already entitled to become freemen who had not actually been enrolled, existing wives and widows, and sons and daughters of freemen, and men who had already married the widows or daughters of freemen. Thus the inchoate property rights of all those who had them in prospect owing to birth, servitude or marriage were protected.

(2) Parliamentary Debates, third series, xxix (1835), pp. 643 et seq. Journals of the House of Commons, xc (1835), p. 458. The minority included William Williams. The 1832 reform bill had disfranchised all those who afterwards acquired freedom by marriage.

(3) Parliamentary Debates, third series, xxix (1835), pp. 673 et seq. Journals of the House of Commons, xc (1835), loc. cit.

(4) Parliamentary Debates, third series, xxix (1835), pp. 737 et seq. Journals of the House of Commons, xc (1835), p. 469. Vyvyan also presented a petition from the burgesses of Bristol, against that part of the bill that deprived them of their rights.

(5) Parliamentary Debates, third series, xxix (1835), p. 751. This petition had been presented by Ellice a few days before (ibid., p. 689) and was the one promoted by George Baddeley. Russell did not mention the 7,000 counter-signatures or the petition calling for the retention of the freemen's franchise, presented in June. Journals of the House of Commons, xc (1835), p. 369.

(6) G.B.A.M. Finlayson, 'The Politics of Municipal Reform, 1835', English Historical Review, lxxxi (1966), p. 682.

From early in June the town clerks of certain threatened corporations - particularly those of Coventry, Norwich and Leicester - had been in correspondence in an attempt to concert opposition to the bill. Thomas Burbidge, the town clerk of Leicester, was the chief mover and became chairman of the formal committee of corporations that was set up at the British Coffee House on 22 June. John Carter became a member.(1) From the first this group had little hope that the Commons, where so many Conservatives (like Peel) were convinced of the need for a substantial change in the municipal system, would reject or even greatly amend the bill.(2) By the end of June, however, there were hopes for at least substantial alteration in the Lords: Carter wrote, 'I am gratified at the stand made by Sir W. Follett, Sir J. Graham, L. Stanley and etc upon the 9th clause respecting the Freemen and I can hardly help auguring favourably as to the result of the Bill in the Lords'.(3) From early in July Carter was in London and in frequent communication with Lord Lyndhurst, the chief opponent of the bill, and with Sir Charles Wetherell, whom Carter hoped to have as counsel for Coventry's case at the bar of the house.(4) On 28 June Lord Strangford presented a petition from Coventry corporation to this effect. The house was with him. Brougham feared interminable delays as other corporations followed Coventry's

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(1) C.R.O.: Doggett Collection: Letters of John Carter, Thomas Burbidge to Carter, 10 June and 22 June 1835, Carter to Burbidge, 25 June 1835. See also A.T. Patterson, Radical Leicester (Leicester, 1954), p. 210.

(2) C.R.O.: Doggett Collection: Letters of John Carter, Burbidge to Carter, 10 June 1835: Burbidge believed that the bill, if passed, would be 'equally fatal to all our party and effectually transfer all political power and influence into the hands of the Whig and Radical Interest as they no doubt intend, but which our friends are so infatuated as not to see or apprehend ... Our aim must be to enlighten our friends and to awaken their fears ... With the aid of all the patronage which we used to possess (and which they will now transfer to our opponents) it was as much as we could do to grapple with the popular party, and when they are to possess the power and the influence and the patronage the attempt will be perfectly hopeless.' For similar fears among Tories (and the congruent hopes of the radical Joseph Parkes) see G.B.A.M. Finlayson, op. cit., pp. 675 et seq

(3) C.R.O.: Doggett Collection: Letters of John Carter, Carter to Burbidge, 25 June 1835. Cf. C.R.O: Letters on Municipal Reform, Osmond to Eld, 2 August 1835. 'I am fully convinced this Bill is the crisis (I say nothing of corporations) of the House of Lords. The comparative indifference of the country, the absence of pressure from without all combine to afford one more chance for the Lordships to do justice to us and to what they love much better, "The Order".'

(4) C.R.O.: Letters on Municipal Reform, Carter to Eld, 3 July, c 20 July 1835, Osmond to Eld, 5 August 1835.

example, and agreed to counsel on the understanding that all corporations would consolidate their cases and that the hearings would take only a few days. Wetherell and Knight, his assistant, pleaded for three days, being fed with material for their case by Carter.(1) Much to the rage of the government's spokesmen, Carnarvon's amendment to the motion that the house should go into committee, that evidence should be heard beforehand, was carried by 124 votes to 54. Evidence was taken for five days against the bill from many boroughs; Coventry's witnesses, Carter, Eld and Charles Woodcock, were the first to be heard.(2) At the committee stage the opposition was led by Lyndhurst. 'He would remind their Lordships that these corporations were copies, imperfect copies he allowed, of the three estates of the realm, and yet they were to be annihilated, for what purpose he could not tell, unless the new corporations were to serve as models for a change of constitution in the House. It would come to that.'(3) He proposed a series of wrecking amendments 'designed to safeguard privilege, property and the nominative, as opposed to the elective, principle in the future government of the boroughs; and all for a purpose, and on a scale, not envisaged in the lower house'.(4) These passed the Lords without difficulty. A property qualification was to be required of councillors; the limit above which towns were to be divided into wards was reduced from 12,000 inhabitants to 6,000;

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(1) ibid., Carter to Eld, 28 July, 1 August 1835. Parliamentary Debates, third series, xxix (1835), pp. 1127 et seq. Journals of the House of Lords, lxvii (1835), pp. 326, 338 et seq.

(2) Parliamentary Debates, third series, xxix (1835), pp. 1355 et seq. Journals of the House of Lords, lxvii (1835), pp. 348 et seq. They attacked the alleged partiality of the municipal commissioners - their using as evidence any gossip unfavourable to the corporation, their reliance upon the testimony of Richard Marriott, their failure to quote in full the favourable verdict of the charity commissioners, and the known radical bias of one of them, Cockburn, who had appeared on the hustings with Sir Henry Lytton Bulwer. Carter argued that the corporation had always been hardworking and incorrupt and that electoral bribery was unknown in the city. Eld, more sensibly, admitted that improvements had recently taken place in the corporation's administration. It was also a matter of complaint that Joseph Parkes, the secretary to the commissioners, had behaved improperly in speaking against the corporation at Ellice's dinner in Coventry at Easter 1834: see on this, C.R.O: Letters on Municipal Reform, Osmond to Eld, 7 August 1835.

(3) Parliamentary Debates, third series, xxix (1835), pp. 1398 et seq

(4) G.B.A.M. Finlayson, 'The Politics of Municipal Reform, 1835', English Historical Review, lxxxi (1966), p. 683.

existing town clerks were to have security of tenure; one quarter of the councillors were to serve for life, under the title of aldermen, and were to be drawn initially from existing corporators.(1) Above all, the freemen's rights were protected. As soon as the house went into committee Lyndhurst moved an amendment to the first substantive clause of the bill which safeguarded the pecuniary and property rights of all those who, but for the act, would have enjoyed them by virtue of their being freemen or the kinsmen of freemen. This amendment passed by 130 votes to 37.(2) Lyndhurst then immediately moved an amendment to the same clause to the effect that men who but for the act would thereafter have had the parliamentary franchise by virtue of their being freemen by birth or servitude should retain it. This met with almost unanimous approval and was carried without a division.(3) As amended, the bill passed its third reading in the Lords by 69 votes to 5 on 28 August.(4)

Some Coventry liberals disliked the amendments. 'The Elliceites have very long faces and affect now to say that they always expected that the freemen would be perpetuated but did not quite expect that their rights would have been preserved to the extent they seem to be.'(5) When the Lords' amendments were considered by the Commons Russell accepted in their entirety those

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(1) loc. cit.

(2) Parliamentary Debates, third series, xxx (1835), pp. 427 et seq. The amendment guaranteed the property rights, as they would have been but for the act, of men who afterwards would have been admitted as freemen, of those who were then or might afterwards be the wives, widows, sons or daughters of freemen, of those who had married or might afterwards marry freemen's widows or daughters, and of those who were then or might afterwards be bound apprentice. Thus the property rights of freemen by birth, servitude and marriage were preserved in perpetuity. Journals of the House of Lords, lxvii (1835), pp. 626 et seq.

(3) Journals of the House of Lords, loc. cit. Parliamentary Debates, third series, xxx (1835), pp. 458 et seq. Harrowby's comment was that 'he considered the perpetuity of those rights as one of the most valuable parts of the Constitution. ... It was a valuable right not only in itself, but with reference to the feelings it was calculated to engender. Nothing could be more desirable, with reference to the general peace of the country, than that even the lowest classes of the people should have the feelings connected with hereditary property.' ibid., p. 461.

(4) ibid., p. 1070. See also C.R.O.: Letters on Municipal Reform, Carter to Eld, 24 August, 25 August, 26 August, 27 August, 28 August 1835 for comments on the passage of the bill through the Lords.

(5) C.R.O.: Doggett Collection: Letters of John Carter, Richard Dewes to Carter, 14 August 1835. See also ibid., Dewes to Carter, 17 August, 18 August, 23 August 1835: 'Abel Rotherham is outrageous. He was I hear exclaiming in the Street this morning "No aldermen or Town Clerks for life" and this sentiment pervades when parties do not think much on the subject.'

relating to the property and voting rights of freemen, though he thought the retention of the freemen, at least, 'an alteration much for the worse'.(1) Russell refused, however, to accept the amendments making town clerks irremovable and creating a class of aldermen for life, drawn initially from existing corporators; he suggested instead aldermen elected by the councillors and drawn from them or from those qualified to become so. Nor would he accept the terms of the qualification suggested by the Lords for town councillors, or their proposals that towns with populations of more than 6,000 should be divided into wards.(2) John Carter felt that the questions of the aldermen and the town clerks were the most important ones,(3) and when Peel signified his agreement with Russell on the aldermanic question Carter was disgusted and felt that the issue might now be lost,(4) although Lord Lyndhurst assured him that 'nothing should induce him to give up the Aldermen'.(5) When the re-amended bill was returned to the Lords for final consideration Carter went to find Lyndhurst but could see only his

(1) Parliamentary Debates, third series, xxx (1835), pp. 1142 et seq. Thus the amendments carried by the Lords preserving the property and voting rights of the freemen became, unaltered, clauses 2 and 4 of the act, 5 and 6 William IV, cap.76. Although several radical members urged outright opposition to all the Lords' amendments, among them only Daniel O'Connell mentioned the freemen's rights, of course pejoratively. They were 'an usurpation. They were rights commenced in wrong and continued in wrong. They established a monopoly and placed it in the hands of a particular class, who obtained the names of freemen.' Parliamentary Debates, third series, xxx (1835), pp. 1159 et seq., 1171 et seq. Peel also registered his disagreement with the Lords' amendments over the freemen's property rights, ibid., p. 1154.

(2) ibid., pp. 1133 et seq. Russell's amendment was that a population of 9,000 should be the lower limit above which towns should be divided into wards.

(3) C.R.O.: Letters on Municipal Reform, Carter to Eld, 31 August 1835: 'If the Lords give up the Aldermen I shall say that they will really deserve the name of destructives'. See also ibid., Carter to Eld, 1 September 1835 (first letter).

(4) Parliamentary Debates, third series, xxx (1835), p. 1150. C.R.O.: Letters on Municipal Reform, Carter to Eld, 1 September 1835 (second letter). 'I cannot describe in adequate terms the feelings I experience, to say that I write under extreme chagrin and disappointment would be a poor and beggarly description - for disgust and abhorrence are predominantly in my mind and heart. I know that you have for some time entertained suspicions of Sir Robert Peel - however strong they may have been you are now fully justified in entertaining them ... I must confess that the conduct of the Baronet has almost destroyed my confidence in any one.' See also ibid., Carter to Eld, 3 September 1835.

(5) ibid., Carter to Eld, 2 September 1835.

secretary; he told him that the conservative interest would suffer unless aldermen were kept in for life. Later, he saw Wellington, who told him of the difficult situation the Lords had been placed in by Peel's action.(1) Later that day (4 September) the Commons' amendment concerning aldermen was agreed to, despite Lyndhurst's efforts; Carter thought he would not be able to sleep because of rage at Peel.(2) Carter and his associates were defeated over the town clerk question too. Devon withdrew his amendment to the 59th clause of the re-amended bill which would have given town clerks life tenure; the government had promised, however, that they would be compensated for loss of office if dismissed.(3)

The last act of the unreformed corporation was a vote of thanks to George Eld, its last mayor, 'particularly for the becoming and dignified manner in which he sustained the just honour and character of the Corporation before the highest tribunal of the country and under circumstances of great and unparalleled difficulty'.(4) A few days later the elections for the reformed corporation took place; of the thirty-six councillors elected for the six wards of the borough, thirty-two were liberals. The four Tories were elected for the North ward and included George Eld. Only one other member of the old corporation was elected to the new on this occasion - Thomas Morris (not to be confused with T.S. Morris) who came top of

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(1) ibid, Carter to Eld, 4 September 1835 (first letter).

(2) Parliamentary Debates, third series, xxx (1835), pp. 1341 et seq. C.R.O.: Letters on Municipal Reform, Carter to Eld, 4 September 1835 (second letter). Peel and his friends 'certainly have behaved most perfidiously towards their friends - and will no doubt ere long rue it ... I have not much prospect of sleep tonight - and am almost inclined not to go to bed'.

(3) Parliamentary Debates, third series, xxx (1835), pp. 1374 et seq. Carter and several other town clerks had discussed the question (apparently shortly before the Lords' debate) with Melbourne, Duncannon, Joseph Parkes and the Attorney-General: who pressed them to accept compensation for loss of office rather than try to push the Lords into granting appointments for life. C.R.O.: Letters on Municipal Reform, Carter to Eld, 5 September 1835. On the qualification of town councillors the Lords accepted the Commons' formula and on the question of warding the Lords insisted that 6,000 should be the limit above which towns should be divided into wards. Parliamentary Debates, third series, xxx (1835), pp. 1369 et seq.

(4) C.R.O.: Council Minutes, 18, 24 December 1835.

the poll in Gosford Street.(1) The elected councillors immediately chose a batch of liberals and radicals as aldermen, none of whom had been members of the old corporation.(2) The first act of public business of the new council was the dismissal of the town clerk, John Carter, and his replacement by T.B. Troughton, the liberal solicitor.(3) The old corporation remained as trustees for the city's charities until 1 August 1836.(4) The town council then debated the question of whom to recommend to the Lord Chancellor as their successors. Eld read extracts from the charity commissioners' report pointing out that he and his colleagues had reformed the administration. Abel Rotherham, though a vehement liberal, defended the record of his brothers Thomas and Richard Kevitt Rotherham as trustees and argued that the list of the new ones should be constructed on merit. The general opinion was summed up by William Browett: he 'wished to clear out the Augean stable, and to have none of the old set'.(5) A list of twenty-four proposed trustees which included

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(1) Coventry Herald, 1 January, 5 February 1836. Coventry Mercury, 2 January, 6 February 1836. The boundary commissioners had decided that the municipality was rightly coterminous with the county of the city; it was thus much larger than the parliamentary borough or the continuous built-up area of the city. The North Ward comprised half the area of the municipality - the extra-city parishes of Foleshill, Anstey, Wyken, Sowe and Exhall. This state of affairs lasted until, after lengthy litigation (which the city lost) the county of the city was dissolved by the County Boundary Act of November 1842 (5 and 6 Vic. Cap. 110) and the municipality given the tiny area it retained till the end of the century. See Chapter I, section I.

(2) Coventry Herald, 1 January 1836. Coventry Mercury, 2 January 1836.

(3) Coventry Herald, 8 January 1836. In February the Street Commissioners transferred their powers to the new corporation. ibid., 5 February 1836. C.R.O.: Orders and Proceedings ... of the Commissioners, 4 February 1836. In February the town council proposed twelve names to the Home Secretary as magistrates for the Coventry petty sessional division. Only two, William Hawkes and Thomas Morris, had previously been magistrates for the city; they had been aldermen in the old corporation and thus magistrates by virtue of that office. Significantly, both had been members of the liberal minority in the old corporation. All the other nominees were liberals too - and almost all were members of the new corporation. Even the radical Richard Hands thought that the exclusion of George Eld from the list was an absurd anomaly. He was overruled by his fellow corporators. Russell accepted the list suggested by them. Coventry Herald, 5 February, 8 April 1836. Coventry Mercury, 6 February, 13 February 1836. C.R.O.: Letters on Municipal Reform, John Carter to Eld, 3 March 1836 - an analysis of the new magistracy.

(4) An amendment to the municipal corporations bill to that effect - to allow a smooth transition to the new state of affairs expected from Brougham's proposed bill on charities - had been carried in the Lords on Lyndhurst's suggestion and accepted by the Commons. Parliamentary Debates, third series, xxx (1835), pp. 645 et seq.

(5) Coventry Herald, 5 August, 26 August, 2 September 1836. Coventry Standard, 2 September 1836.

none of the old was then decided on and submitted to the Lord Chancellor. Eld and Thomas Rotherham immediately petitioned the Lord Chancellor for the twenty old corporators to remain as trustees. When in the autumn a Master in Chancery decided that the charities should be divided into three groups - the General, Church and Sir Thomas White's charities - and that each should have its own board of trustees, the old and new corporations submitted rival lists. The lists of the latter excluded old trustees, gave overwhelming predominance to liberals and included dissenters for the Church charities. Those of the former gave the old trustees and Tories a majority on all three groups - William Hawkes and Thomas Morris being dropped as trustees because they were liberals - and included only Anglicans for the Church charities. The Master in Chancery settled the quarrel, and arranged compromise lists which included some old trustees, notably Eld and R.K. Rotherham, and excluded dissenters from the Church charities' trustees. Thus by the end of 1836 the corporation had ceased to be concerned with the administration of the charities. And their administration was now recognised by both sides to be impartial and satisfactory and ceased to be a matter of controversy. The charities did not become the subject of debate in the city until the charity commissioners' proposals for their reorganisation in the 1850s.(1)

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(1) Coventry Herald, 26 August, 30 September, 9 December, 30 December 1836. Coventry Standard, 30 September, 30 December 1836.

III

The Freeman Franchise after 1835

A few years after the Municipal Corporations Act the Coventry freemen gained a concession which made their franchise less onerous. In March 1837 William Williams (one of the city's M.P.s) introduced a bill to remit the stamp duty of £1. 3s. 6d. payable on admission to the freedom. It passed its second reading by 75 votes to 21, but Russell argued that in equity the £10 householders (a class of electors which obviously he still preferred) ought to be allowed some relaxation of the stringent rate-paying conditions under which they had the suffrage, if the freemen were given the concession Williams proposed. Accordingly, he gained the adjournment of the committee stage of Williams's bill to allow him to introduce a wider measure. His bill, abolishing the stamp duty and making £10 electors eligible for re-inclusion in the July registers if they had paid rates up to the preceding October, instead of April, as was then the rule, passed the Commons but was defeated in the Lords, who objected to the concession to the £10 electors. Russell introduced an identical bill at the end of the year, with an identical result. Williams then re-introduced his original bill, which passed the Lords easily and received the royal assent in July 1838.(1)

Russell made one last effort to disfranchise the freemen. His reform bill of 1854 would have disfranchised by clause 20 all freemen enrolled after the act. On this occasion Ellice defended the Coventry freemen against allegations of corruption, which he

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(1) 1 and 2 Vict., cap. 35, An Act to Repeal the Stamp Duty now paid on Admission to the Freedom of Corporations in England. Williams gained most support from Colonel Sibthorp, Arthur Trevor and Lord Sandon, member for the freeman borough of Liverpool. Ellice did not speak at all, and did not vote during the passage of Williams's second bill. Parliamentary Debates, third series, xxxvi (1837), p. 1186, xxxviii (1837), pp. 291 et seq, xxxix (1837-38), pp. 1057 et seq, xl (1837-38), pp. 789 et seq, xli (1837-38), pp. 694 et seq, xlii (1837-38), pp. 905, 1169, xliii (1837-38), pp. 684, 781. Journals of the House of Commons, xcii (1837), pp. 92 et seq, xciii (1837-38), pp. 167 et seq. Journals of the House of Lords, lxix (1837), p. 616, lxx (1837-38), p. 148. The four bills are in P.P.: H.C. (1837) ii, p. 431, and iii, p. 187; H.C. (1837-38) ii, p. 1, and iii, p. 457.

said had not existed in the city since the end of the unreformed corporation. Since then he had not known either his friends or foes to take a shilling. 'He should be unworthy to represent those poor men in that House if he did not bear that testimony to their purity.'(1) The seven-year apprenticeship was a guarantee of the uprightness and independence of the Coventry electorate - who were those very members of the respectable working class that Russell said he wanted to enfranchise by other clauses in his bill. The other member for the city, Geach, spoke to the same effect, and Sibthorp wished that Her Majesty's Government were as pure as the freemen of Lincoln. Russell replied that although the Coventry freemen might be honest, others were not - that in fact they were a more corrupt class of electors than any other. The Coventry freemen protested against the bill at a meeting chaired by David Buckney. It was, however, dropped before the second reading because of the onset of the Crimean War.(2)

Thus through several vicissitudes the freeman franchise was preserved. Many boroughs gained, but the results were more long-lasting in Coventry than elsewhere. Immediately after the 1832 Reform Act there were 108,000 ancient-right electors on the registers; over 63,000 of them were freemen.(3) Coventry had 2,756 freemen and 529 £10 electors: a higher number of ancient-right electors than any boroughs except the City of London and Bristol, while the proportion they formed of the electorate was surpassed only by Maldon, though nearly equalled by Beverley, Carlisle and York. If not exceptional, Coventry's position was remarkable. By 1865 the freemen registered in English boroughs had dropped to 40,000, and the other types of ancient-right elector to 8,457. But the number of freemen registered in Coventry had risen to 3,911, a higher total than in any borough except the City of London. And the Coventry freemen formed a greater proportion of the electorate - four-fifths - than ancient-right voters anywhere else. The high registration of freemen was partly accounted for by the decision of 608 £10 householders to choose the other franchise - a reflection no doubt of its superior prestige. They comprised, however, only

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(1) Parliamentary Debates, third series, cxxx (1854), pp. 516 et seq.

(2) ibid., pp. 491 et seq, cxxxi (1854), pp. 277 et seq. Coventry Standard, 3 March 1854.

(3) Charles Seymour, op. cit., p. 83.

15% of the freeman electorate.(1) What is clear is the way the economic structure of the town influenced its electorate: males in the two dominating trades usually served apprenticeships that brought the freedom and thus the franchise. The official estimate was that in 1865 69.8% of Coventry's electorate was 'working class', the highest percentage in England; Stafford's was next with 57.7% and the City of London the last, at 8.9%.(2) The figures need careful handling: the compilers were instructed that 'working class' did not connote shopkeepers, shop assistants or factory foremen, but did connote artisans employing journeymen or apprentices, provided that they derived 'their chief support from their own hand labour': thus, it was said, many Coventry watchmakers were included in the category.(3) Fortuitously inflated the Coventry percentage may have been: yet the impression of a uniquely popular electorate which it gives is reinforced by the fact that in 1866 almost one person in eight in the city was an elector: there were nearly 5,000 electors in a population of 41,647. This was the highest proportion in all the English boroughs.(4)

The second and third reform acts dramatically altered every electorate: yet in Coventry the number of freeman electors remained uniquely large. By 1893 the total of ancient-right electors in the English boroughs had sunk to just over 28,000; 4,000 of them were Coventry freemen, the number of occupiers and lodgers in Coventry being just over 7,000.(5) By 1915 there were fewer than 20,000 ancient-right electors left in English boroughs - a tiny remnant of the ancient privilege for which Wetherell and Sibthorp had fought: 6,427 of them were liverymen of the City of London, and nearly 3,000 Coventry freemen - a far higher number than was registered in any other borough. At the same time, there were more than 17,000 Coventry electors with the more recent qualifications.(6) Most freemen electors could no doubt have chosen another

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(1) P.P.: [3626] H.C. (1866) lvii: Electoral Returns, Boroughs and Counties, 1865-66, pp. 9 et seq, 69 et seq.

(2) P.P.: H.C. 170 (1866) lvii: Electoral Statistics, pp. 2 et seq.

(3) P.P.: [3626] H.C. (1866) lvii, pp. vii, lll.

(4) P.P.: H.C. 381 (1874) liii: Electoral Statistics: Return to an Address ... dated 1 May 1874, pp. 2 et seq.

(5) P.P.: H.C. 40 (1894) lxviii: Return showing the Number of the several Classes of Electors, pp. 8 et seq.

(6) P.P.: H.C. 120 (1914-16) lii: Return showing the Number in each Class of Electors, pp. 7 et seq.

mode of suffrage. The adherence of thousands to their ancient right was probably, for the majority, the result of inertia rather than active choice. Yet aged Coventrians still recall with pride that they voted as freemen, not as mere householders or lodgers, before ancient distinctions were overwhelmed by the levelling tide of manhood suffrage in 1918. The nostalgic affection for antique privilege which is apparent at meetings of the Freemen's Association in the 1960s is a pale afterglow of the intense pride in caste and status that Coventry freemen possessed a century ago: a pride that made the more remarkable their willingness, during the Reform Bill crisis, to sacrifice 'their petty localities' for the sake of national reform.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE RIBBON TRADE, 1832-1860

I

The Industry in the 1830s

There had been 8,491 looms in the Warwickshire ribbon trade in 1818.(1) By 1838 there were 13,219, whose distribution is shown in the following table.(2)

Table IV: Distribution of Looms in the Ribbon Trade, 1838

Area	Plain Engine	Jacquard Engine	Single Hand	Total
Coventry city and immediate suburbs - Radford and Stoke	3,452	1,278	129	4,859
Foleshill (and Exhall)	50	400	2,250	2,700
Anstey			10	10
Shilton			50	50
Sowe		30	250	280
Bedworth		320	1,000	1,320
Bulkington			800	800
Nuneaton and District		200	3,000	3,200
	3,502	2,228	7,489	13,219

The two tables reveal the great increase in the industry's productive capacity in twenty years: the slight increases in the numbers of plain-engine and single-hand looms were dwarfed by the

(1) See Table III.

(2) Source of this table: P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840), xxiv, p. 12.

phenomenal growth in the number of jacquard looms after 1823, introduced to weave fancy ribbons. They show, too, the continued domination of the industry by Coventry itself and the contiguous weaving district of Foleshill: at both dates they contained more than half the looms and far more than half the total productive capacity, since the great majority of the engine looms (both plain and jacquard) were concentrated there. By 1838 the single-hand loom had almost disappeared from the city itself. There were four manufacturers at Nuneaton, six at Bedworth and one at Foleshill - these last seven being in a small line of business. The great majority of looms, over the whole area, thus served the 127 manufacturers of Coventry itself. These varied greatly in the scale of their operations, as the following table shows.(1)

Table V: The Size of Manufacturers' Establishments, 1838

Number of manufacturers	Number of looms employed
1	nearly 400
5	between 200 and 300
6	between 100 and 200
16	between 50 and 100
29	between 10 and 50
70	fewer than 10

The undertaking system survived only in the weaving districts outside Coventry itself; the dispersion of the labour force and its unreliable and frequently untrained nature made necessary some close superintendence of the weaving and hence some mediation between the manufacturer and the weaver. The 7,500 single-hand looms of the northern parishes, and some of the engine looms too, were owned by about 1,000 undertakers; the looms were sometimes in their houses and sometimes in the weavers' cottages. The number of looms the undertaker owned varied greatly: one had fifty, several about sixteen and some as few as two or three, but the majority had about seven or eight. The supervision of this number occupied all the undertaker's time and only those with a few looms would weave themselves. Three quarters of their weavers were women

(1) Source of table: P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 35.

and girls and half the males were under twenty; some of the child weavers were half-pay outdoor apprentices; domiciliary apprenticeship was unknown in the outparishes and the instruction given to the apprentices there was much inferior to that enjoyed by the apprentices (whether indoor or outdoor) of the city itself. Children also assisted (sometimes at the age of eight) at the tasks subsidiary to weaving - especially filling, winding and warping, which it was part of the undertaker's responsibility to carry out.(1)

In the city and its immediate suburbs, Radford and Stoke, the trade was dominated by the journeywork system: that is, the manufacturer gave out the silk to the first-hand journeyman, or master weaver, who would then weave the ribbon on his own premises; the warping of the silk was performed by the manufacturer (a warping machine being necessary for this) but the winding was carried out by the first-hand, though at the rise of the journeywork system this too had been done by the manufacturer. There were many first-hand journeymen, and journeywomen, owning (or in some cases hiring) 3,967 looms: but the average number of looms possessed by each first-hand was small, as the following table shows.(2)

Table VI: Ownership of looms by first-hand journeymen, 1838

No. of looms	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
No. of owners	693	461	305	171	62	36	15	9	2	1	2

Of this total of 1,828 first-hands, 1,614 were men, and 214 were women. Thus 3,145 (or more than three quarters) of the first-hands' looms were worked by the first-hands themselves and their wives, children and indoor apprentices; only 822 were worked by journeymen's journeyhands (the weavers who did not possess looms of their own) and by outdoor apprentices. Edward Goode was a typical Coventry first-hand, whose two looms were worked by himself and his wife. But socially the first-hands shaded imperceptibly into the class of very small manufacturers; some 40 of the 70 masters who kept in work fewer than 10 looms each were first-hands who had decided to weave directly for the London wholesalers; these 40 owned only 121 looms between them. Men like these moved back and forth between the positions of first-hand journeyman and independent manufacturer as the fortunes of the trade suggested, drawing upon small savings to buy silk: hence the derisive term applied to their activities - the

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(1) P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 37 et seq. Coventry Herald, 13 January 1832, 18 July 1834, 20 March 1835.
(2) Source of table: P.P. [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 41.

'tea-pot system'.(1)

The number of looms in manufacturers' loomshops and factories was very much less than that of looms in the first-hands' own houses: only 598 in establishments owned by 27 men, and worked by journey-hands and half-pay apprentices. There were also loomshops in Bedworth and Nuneaton, employing on the engine loom journeymen who had moved up from the single-hand trade.(2)

In the city and suburbs the first-hands were much the largest single group of weavers, as this table shows.(3)

Table VII: Ribbon weavers in Coventry and its immediate suburbs, November 1838

First-hand journeymen, working their own looms	1,501 (4)
Women loom-owners and wives of male first-hands	886
Journeymen's journeymen	838 (5)
Journeymen's journeywomen	347 (6)
Boys of the first-hands' families	153
Girls of the first-hands' families	235
Indoor apprentice boys	271 (7)
Indoor apprentice girls	99 (7)
Half-pay apprentice boys	152 (8)
Half-pay apprentice girls	49 (8)
	4,531 (9)

(1) P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 39 et seq,47; H.C. 341 (1835) xiii, p. 241. Coventry Herald, 29 January 1836. Coventry Standard, 28 August 1840.

(2) P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 39 et seq, 47 et seq.

(3) Source of table: P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 40.

(4) About 100 male first-hands did not themselves weave: hence the discrepancy between this figure and the total of Table VI.

(5) About 550 worked for first-hands, and the rest in loomshops and factories.

(6) 302 worked for first-hands, and the rest in loomshops and factories.

(7) All these were apprenticed to first-hands.

(8) 52 of the boys, and 46 of the girls worked for first-hands, and the rest in loomshops and factories.

(9) This gives a smaller number of weavers than of looms: see Table IV. In addition, the total of looms in establishments of various kinds listed in previous paragraphs is less than that given in Table IV but more than the total of weavers given in Table VII. The census from which all the figures in this section have been drawn was plainly inexact, though the discrepancies are not great enough to cause distrust of the proportions of the various classes of loom and weaver.

II

The Growth of Steam Power

Between 1838 and 1858 the most dramatic development in the ribbon trade was the growth of the steam factory. After the burning of Beck's factory there were no further attempts at power production for some years. The first venture was in Nuneaton, where in January 1834 575 inhabitants requisitioned the Overseers of the Poor to call a meeting to consider the building of a steam factory to enable the depressed and impoverished single-hand weavers of North Warwickshire to compete with the engine looms of Coventry. The meeting resolved to attempt power weaving and a factory was opened in December 1835 and let to Stephen Barnwell, a Coventry manufacturer. But three years later the venture had failed and the factory had closed. In the week that the Nuneaton factory opened a group of manufacturers, gentlemen, and leading tradesmen in Coventry, believing that only by steam power could the trade beat foreign and domestic competition, formed the Coventry Steam Power Company to build a steam factory. Initial capital was £15,000 in shares of £5. The factory was ready by October 1837; it had a 20h.p. steam engine and consisted of seven flats, each 100' long and 36' wide. These were to be let to manufacturers who would provide their own looms and buy the power: the results of the weavers' dislike of steam factories would fall on them rather than on the company in the background. It was difficult to let the flats to ribbon manufacturers and by August the factory had been sold to the South British Cotton Company for cotton spinning. At about the same time John Day had opened a steam factory, but had applied the power to the weaving of fancy ribbons on jacquard looms, for which as yet steam was unsuited. This venture of Day's soon went bankrupt. Thus when Fletcher reported in 1838 there were no power looms outside the city and only 53 in it - 45 in Day's defunct establishment and 8 belonging to Thomas Cope, who was experimenting (but not noticeably succeeding)

in the production of plain ribbons on them.(1)

Two years later the Coventry Herald published a long description of J. and C. Ratliff's steam factory in Hill Street - which apparently occupied Day's old premises - in such a way as to imply that it was an unusual, if not unique, feature in the city; in any case, much of the Ratliffs' production was broad silks, not ribbons.(2) Accounts of the dispute in the figured trade in the spring of 1843 show that by then there were several steam ribbon factories in the city and that there was some jacquard power-weaving: though it is impossible to know the numbers involved since in the lists of manufacturers in dispute those with loomshops are not clearly distinguished from those with steam factories.(3) In 1848 there were many manufacturers in Coventry with steam factories for plain or figured ribbons: Cope and Hammerton, Stephen Barnwell, J. and C. Ratliff, Sturdy and Turner, Robinson and Lynes, William and Henry Browett, W.H. and Charles Bray (4), Thomas Brown, and perhaps more.(5) These were plainly years of quite rapid development. There were 1,301 operatives in silk spinning and weaving mills in Warwickshire in 1847.(6) Three years later there were 1,742 in 19 weaving factories with 704 power looms and another 247 in 4 spinning or throwing mills;(7) only two of these last mills seems to have been in Coventry itself;(8) but all 19 weaving factories were in the city.(9) Concurrently, loomshops without steam power were in decline: by 1851 there were only 8 containing fewer than 150 looms.(10) Thus in 1852 Harriet Martineau found strange the conjunction of the ancient and the Victorian in Coventry:

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(1) P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 11, 47 et seq. Coventry Herald, 10 January 1834, 28 February, 23 October 1835, 4 December 1835, 8 April 1836, 6 October 1837, 10 August 1838. Joseph Gutteridge, op. cit., p. 64.

(2) Coventry Herald, 30 October 1840.

(3) Coventry Standard, 10 March, 17 March, 24 March, 31 March, 7 April 1843. Coventry Herald, 3 March, 10 March, 7 April 1843.

(4) Of Earl Street; not to be confused with Charles Bray the philosopher, whose ribbon house was in Much Park Street. This latter Bray was not a power master.

(5) Coventry Standard, 28 April 1848.

(6) P.P.: H.C. 294 (1847) xlvi: A Return of the Total Number of Persons employed in Silk Factories, etc., p. 6.

(7) P.P.: H.C. 745 (1850) xlii: Returns of the Number of ... Silk Factories, etc., pp. 8 et seq.

(8) Francis White and Co., History, Gazetteer and Directory of Warwickshire (Sheffield, 1850), p. 559 lists two throwsters in the city.

(9) Coventry Standard, 11 October 1850.

(10) Coventry Herald, 18 July 1851.

> We pass under St. Michael's Church, and look up, amazed, to the beauty and loftiness of its spire ... The crumbling nature of the stone gives a richness and beauty to the edifice ... And then, at an angle of the market place, there is Tom, peeping past the corner - looking out of his window, through his spectacles, with a stealthy air, which, however ridiculous, makes one thrill, as with a whiff of the breeze which stirred the Lady Godiva's hair ... so long ago. It is strange, after this, to see the factory chimney, straight, tall, and handsome, in its way, with its inlaying of coloured bricks, towering before us, to about the height of a hundred and thirty feet. No place has proved itself more unwilling than Coventry to admit such innovation.(1)

Mr. Prest has pointed out that between 1852 and 1857 the Local Board of Health passed plans for twelve ribbon factories - eight of them in 1856 and 1857.(2) The size of these new factories was commented upon in the press - Townsend's in West Orchard, for example.(3) Most spectacular was James Hart's Victoria factory at St. John's Bridge, opened in January 1857: it was 127' long, 45' wide, nearly 80' high, contained 5 storeys and held 250 power looms. Between 800 and 1,000 operatives were to be employed there.(4) The ribbon trade was transformed in these years. By the summer of 1859 there were 1,250 power looms in 15 large factories - more than twenty times the number in 1838 and almost double the number in 1850.(5) One year later there were 1,500 power looms in large factories.(6) Equally important was the growth in the size of looms installed in the most modern factories from about 1856 onwards. The power looms of 1838 had 8 shuttles; by 1848 12 shuttles were usual; by 1858 the up-to-date power looms of Hart and the half dozen or so like him had 18 or even 22 shuttles. Hart and the other modernising masters possessed more power looms than all the other factory masters (about 20) put together, and because their looms were large they produced many more ribbons.(7)

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(1) Harriet Martineau, 'Rainbow Making', Household Words, iv (1852), p. 488. The factory was probably Cope and Hammerton's, in Priory Yard. The article was attributed to Harriet Martineau by the Coventry Standard, 12 March 1852.
(2) J. Prest, op. cit., p. 94.
(3) Coventry Standard, 13 June 1856.
(4) ibid., 2 January 1857. Hart, whose offices and warehouse for the outdoor trade were in Earl Street, Coventry, had also had a steam factory in Bedworth from 1854 onwards. Coventry Herald, 9 June 1854.
(5) P.P.: [2594] H.C. (1860) xxiv: Reports of Inspectors of Factories for the Half-Year ending 31 October 1859, pp. 56 et seq.
(6) P.P.: [2765] H.C. (1861) xxii: Reports of Inspectors of Factories for the Half-Year ending 31 October 1860, p. 44.
(7) Coventry Herald, 3 September 1858. Coventry Weekly Times, 22 September 1858. Coventry Standard, 1 October 1858. In a survey of four large factories, about 1857, Charles Bray found that of their 1,273 workers, 645 were male - 119 under 20, and 727 female - 226 under 20. Charles Bray, The Industrial Employment of Women (London, 1857), p. 7.

At the same time, there were still more looms in the outdoor than in the factory trade.(1) One of the most remarkable characteristics of the ribbon industry in the 1840s and 1850s was the survival of the outdoor trade and the determined attempts of its weavers to compete with factory power - and when they failed, to dominate and crush it. A detailed directory for the city for 1850 lists 613 first-hands with 3 or more looms at their own houses.(2) There had been 603 twelve years earlier.(3) The outdoor weavers were under attack, but fought back.

The outdoor weavers' dislike of factories, as workplaces that infringed their feelings of dignity and independence, and offended their sense of morality,(4) as creators of surplus productive power and - as far as the first-hand was concerned - as threats to the machinery which he had invested in and to the working together of his family at home, were frequently mentioned and are evidenced by their own actions.(5) In 1850, one journeyman's journeyman (who had of course no capital invested in machinery and who did not work at his house) complained nevertheless of the competition of the factories and their power looms, and asked:

> How is it possible for a middle-aged man to change his trade, and compete with other men in other trades? and is not improving machinery progressing in other trades as it is in the silk business? ... The only liberty that is now left for a free-born Englishman of the working-class, when he gets a few grey hairs on his head, is the power and the temptation to commit suicide.(6)

Three years later a meeting of factory hands, held in St. Mary's Hall to petition parliament for an efficient Ten Hours' Bill chanted 'No' when Joseph Rayner Stephens asked them if as a result of the

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(1) Coventry Herald, 22 October 1858.
(2) Lascelles and Co., Directory and Gazetteer of the City of Coventry (Coventry, 1850), pp. 60 et seq, 84 et seq. This includes 121 in Hillfields.
(3) See Table VI. There are no figures for the total number of looms in the outdoor trade after 1838 and none for the number of first-hands after 1850.
(4) See Joseph Gutteridge, op. cit., p. 149:
> The factory system of that time [ie. before 1860] was most vile ... Only those who have had experience under the system which embraced the indiscriminate association of adults and young people of both sexes with but little restraint, in a tainted atmosphere, can tell of the moral depravity that like a poisonous miasma enervated, if it did not utterly destroy in too many instances, the respect owed by the workpeople to themselves and to society.

(5) Coventry Herald, 11 December, 18 December 1835, 31 July 1840, 10 May 1844, 27 April, 11 May 1855.
(6) Coventry Standard, 22 February 1850.

factory system their homes were happier, if men and women enjoyed their society more, if they were able to give as much time to their children, if young men and women were as moral and virtuous.(1)

In 1835 the Coventry Herald suggested that the way to reconcile the need for productive efficiency with the weavers' dislike of factory labour was the installation of power looms in cottages.(2) Ten years later Charles Bray returned to this notion in its columns in a series of articles which recommended cottage factories in passing.(3) The first cottage factories in the city seem to have been built five years later, by Eli Green, a ribbon manufacturer, in East Street, Hillfields. Eleven houses were built with an engine house and shafting for steam power; they were for rent and were 'calculated to remove many of the objections to the factory system'.(4) It was this group of cottages which Charles Bray

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(1) ibid., 18 February 1853. See also the letters of Richard Hartopp, a Foleshill ribbon weaver, on the immorality of the factories and the moral superiority of the outdoor handwork system, Coventry Standard, 4 May, 11 May, 18 May, 22 June 1855. He asked J. and J. Cash to 'make every effort possible to improve the moral and temperate habits of those in your employ ... the superintendent which you have appointed will, by the force of example, materially check the pernicious influences by which our factory populations are too often surrounded': ibid., 22 June1855. And in opposition to the factory and steam power; 'I believe that the despised human machinery is the mainspring of our social fabric. It gives us bread, clothes, and houses; it gives us wealth, and rest, and life; and, as the foundation of humanity's great temple, the crowning keystone of civilisation, every available means ought to be used, not in degrading, but in elevating it in the scale of physical comforts': ibid., 18 May 1855. Hartopp, like Bray, had been an Owenite.

(2) Coventry Herald, 25 December 1835.

(3) ibid., 7 March, 14 March, 21 March 1845. Bray advocated more strongly at this time the building of rural communities where conventional steam factories would be accompanied by large gardens: by spade cultivation workers would become healthier than in crowded cities and could protect themselves from the precariousness of money wages and the effects of periodic slump; the time spent in agricultural labour would also lessen the over-production natural in an age of increasing steam power. An Essay upon the Union of Agriculture and Manufacture and upon the Organisation of Industry (London, 1844), pp. 14 et seq. The plan owes much to Owenism: see his description of such a rural community, ibid, pp. 105 et seq. It most probably influenced the Cash brothers (friends of Bray) in the building of the Kingfield estate in 1857. Bray was in the 1840s an active supporter of James Orange's scheme for artisans' allotments and the founder of the Coventry Labourers' and Artisans' Friend Society, which had the provision of allotments as one of its aims. Coventry Herald, 7 October 1842, 27 January 1843, 1 November 1844, 16 July 1845, 21 August, 16 October 1846, 10 September 1847. Coventry Standard, 7 October 1842, 27 October 1843, 8 November 1844, 10 October 1845. Charles Bray, Phases of Opinion and Experience, pp. 64 et seq.

(4) Coventry Standard, 22 November 1850.

probably had in mind when in July 1851 he mentioned the cottage factories recently built in Coventry and recommended their extension as a means of combining efficiency with morality. In them families would be kept together, and the 'coarse jests, and low moral tone' of the factory avoided.(1) Women weavers could look after younger children instead of neglecting them as factory labour forced them to. Bray suggested that the cottages themselves might be built on the plan of Prince Albert's model dwellings, constructed in Hyde Park for the Great Exhibition, and that they should be surrounded with garden land for the occasional employment and recreation of the weavers.(2) Three years later Bray again stressed the virtues of cottage factories - 'to give the advantage of the factory to families who might thus be as individual and exclusive as upon the old system'.(3)

One cannot know how many builders were in the early 1850s taking Bray's advice. But in 1855 a society was formed that enabled weavers to take advantage of such cottage factories as were then being built. The loom which was appropriate to cottage factories was the a-la-bar loom - larger than the old handloom, and workable by steam or hand power. In September 1855 the Coventry and Warwickshire A-la-Bar Loom Society was formed to enable poor outdoor weavers to acquire a-la-bar looms of their own, with which they could work at home 'in the midst of their family'(4) and yet compete on more equal terms with the steam factories then rapidly developing. Weavers could buy looms of several sizes: savings of 1s. per week would in time form a deposit for a loom costing £34, and of 1s.6d. a week one for a loom costing £51. Deposits secured looms, after which they were paid for out of profits, at 3s. and 5s. a week for the different sizes. The society was actively encouraged by William Haughton, a leader of the Factory Operatives' Association,

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(1) Coventry Herald, 11 July 1851.

(2) Coventry Herald, 11 July, 8 August 1851. None of the cottage factories existing in Coventry today seem to bear any resemblance to Prince Albert's model cottages. Bray's other suggestion in these articles was for ribbon masters to build private villages (as the Ashworths and Greggs had) to keep their weavers' morals under scrutiny. This idea too may have influenced the Cash brothers in their building of Kingfield.

(3) Coventry Herald, 13 July 1854. Bray put his plan for cottage factories firmly into an Owenite communitarian context in his Philosophy of Necessity (London 1863), p. 410: he suggested communities of 300 or 400 cottages, arranged in squares, with a steam engine to provide power; each cottage would have as much land attached to it as a man could cultivate.

(4) Coventry Times, 19 September 1855.

who thus displayed the familiar attitude of the factory weavers - that they wished to truncate, not extend, the system in which they worked. Its trustees included William Lynes, one of the leading Conservatives of the city, and Edward Goode, the veteran radical; its solicitor was William Wilmot, the reactionary Tory who acted also for the two weavers' trade unions. The Coventry Times wished it success, 'as it appears very probable that the time is not far distant, when all not furnished with an a-la-bar loom must of necessity seek employment in a factory'.(1) Fifty members were enrolled at its first meeting and in the years that followed there was a rapid growth in numbers.(2)

At the end of 1856 William Andrews, one of the Cash brothers' managers, walked out along the Foleshill Road to 'go and look at the land ... where Cash's are going to build the houses near Foleshill'.(3) These were the most impressive block of cottage factories built - situated at Kingfield, then a mile beyond the built-up area of Coventry and outside the city boundary, and set among fields. John and Joseph Cash, the friends of Charles Bray who had assisted him in the Labourers' and Artisans' Friend Society and who were doubtless influenced by his ideas on social organisation and the rural location of industry, engaged to design the cottages the most prominent local architect, James Murray, who had recently designed the Coventry Corn Exchange. Forty-eight substantial three-storey cottages were built in two terraces; they had neo-Gothic windows and mock-Tudor gabling. Some had two bedrooms, some three. All had top-shops for two large looms, steam-shafting for power, and large gardens. The access road (now Cash's Lane) was made up and lit by gas. The site occupied seven acres and was planned as a community; the Cash brothers planned to build shops and a school room (which was not completed) and provided a free lending library of 235 books for tenants.(4) The cottages were welcomed by the Coventry Weekly Times 'as a step

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(1) loc. cit.
(2) Coventry Herald, 9 November 1855, 16 October 1857, Coventry Times, 19 September 1855, Coventry Weekly Times, 17 September 1856, 14 October 1857. Coventry Standard, 10 October 1856, 9 October 1857, 8 October 1858. Joseph Gutteridge, op. cit., pp. 93 et seq. Gutteridge bought an a-la-bar loom in the 1850s from his employer, Hennell, (who also built it) by weekly deductions from his earnings.
(3) C.R.O. MS diary of William Andrews, 30 November 1856.
(4) C.W.C.: MS Catalogue of Kingfield Free Library. The Cash brothers planned to build 300 cottages eventually at Kingfield. C. Bray, The Industrial Employment of Women (London, 1857), p. 8.

in the right direction, combining all the advantages of the factory with the comfort of the private house and the domestic hearth'.(1) By the third week in September they were completed, and steam power laid on. They were taken within a few days by first-hands; they were not bound to work for Cash's outdoor department.(2)

Despite the popularity of the Cash brothers' steam cottage factories, however, it is clear that until 1857 most first-hands with a-la-bar looms were using not steam but muscle power (provided by 'turning boys') to work them. In 1857 there were only 88 silk-weaving factories in Warwickshire:(3) if the conventional factories are excluded only about 50 cottage steam factories are left and even if the Kingfield houses are added to these the total is still only 100, after cottage factories with steam power had been advocated for over twenty years and in existence since 1850. The years of rapid growth for the steam cottage factory are 1858 and 1859, when, as Mr. Prest has pointed out, Eli Green built his spectacular triangle of 67 cottage factories in Hillfields.(4) These were not the only new ones: in the summer of 1859 there were 300 steam cottage factories in Coventry, and six months later there were more still. In the spring of 1861 there were 383, and some others where the a-la-bar looms were still worked by hand, bringing the total number of cottage factories to many hundreds. Not all the new steam cottage factories of these years were in buildings erected for power. Many first-hands converted their a-la-bar looms to steam power in 1858 and 1859 because of its greater efficiency; so in the summer of 1860 1,000 of the 3,400 a-la-bar looms in cottage factories were worked by steam; at the same time there were 1,500

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(1) Coventry Weekly Times, 1 April 1857.

(2) Coventry Herald, 18 September 1857. The Cash brothers engaged Andrews as manager of Kingfield at £120 a year; he opened their warehouse there and at least some of the weavers wove for Cash's: Andrews was from the first at odds with them because of his refusal to pay by or sign the list currently demanded for figured ribbons. He moved to Drapers Fields to manage Cash's outdoor tradein June 1858. C.R.O.: MS diary of William Andrews, 15 October, 17 October, 19 October, 27 October, 31 October, 6 November, 7 November, 9 November 1857, 3 June 1858.

(3) P.P.: H.C. 7 (1857 - Session 1) xiv: Returns of the Number of ... Silk Factories, etc., p. 10. The existence of 'turning boys' at the a-la-bar looms in the outdoor trade is mentioned in the Coventry Standard, 10 September 1858.

(4) J. Prest, op. cit., p. 102.

steam looms in large factories. Some of the proprietors of steam cottage factories owned, hired, or were buying on credit up to 6 looms, but most had only 2, worked by their own families, with a little hired labour.(1) Thus they created 'a phase in manufacture which is highly interesting at the present moment ... an attempt to return to its domestic condition of 70 years ago, with the addition of steampower'(2) ... 'the material of a healthier state of manufacture altogether, since they do not separate the mother from the home or family'.(3)

The timing of the rapid growth in the number of steam cottage factories was significant: it came shortly after the modernising of the larger factories, and in particular the opening of the Victoria factory - when the crucial need to add steam to the outdoor trade to compete with the factory masters became apparent. But even when modernised, it could not beat Hart and his colleagues, if they were allowed to work their giant looms in the most profitable way.(4) The realisation of this by the outdoor trade helped to cause in the summer of 1858 the weavers' campaign to raise the production costs of the modern factories by imposing on them an expensive list of prices.

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(1) P.P.: [2594] H.C. (1860) xxiv: Reports of Inspectors of Factories for the Half-Year ending 31 October 1859, pp. 56 et seq; [2689] H.C. (1860) xxxiv.: Reports of Inspectors of Factories ... 30 April 1860, pp. 58 et seq; [2765] H.C. (1861) xxii.: Reports of Inspectors of Factories ... 31 October 1860, p. 44; [2854] H.C. (1861) xxii: Reports of Inspectors of Factories ... 30 April 1861, pp. 35, 38. William Andrews, Papers Relating to the Ribbon Trade and the Commercial Treaties with France (Coventry, 1878), pp. 17 et seq, quoting the register of looms (since lost) taken by the Committee of the Weavers' Association, at end of 1860. There were also some steam cottage-factories outside the city: the Coventry Weekly Times, 1 September 1858, mentions some at Attleborough, each with room for two looms.

(2) P.P.: [2594] H.C. (1860) xxiv, p. 57.

(3) P.P.: [2689] H.C. (1860) xxxiv, p. 59. See also the description of the cottage-factory system in Coventry Standard, 10 September 1858: 'The occupier of the house has by thrift or by borrowing obtained one or more of these bar looms, and of course proceeds to make the best of them'.

(4) P.P. [2854] H.C. (1861) xxii, p. 35.

III

Boom and Slump in the Ribbon Trade

Throughout the 1830s, 1840s and 1850s the productive capacity of the Warwickshire industry grew: and though the market for ribbons grew too, it rarely equalled the potential supply. There were too many looms and too many weavers. In the summer of 1851, for example, the Coventry Herald pointed out that there had been an immense increase in productive power in the previous decade and complained that this had outstripped demand, great as this was: 'already one of the largest buyers in the market has been heard to declare that he has as much old stock as would sink the President steamship'.(1) The following year Harriet Martineau explained the underlying problems of the industry for a wider audience.

> Great as is the demand, the production has, thus far, much exceeded it. The soundest capitalists may be heard complaining that theirs is a losing trade. Less substantial capitalists have been obliged to get rid of their stock at any price they could obtain: and those ribbons, sold at a loss, intercept the sales of the fair-dealing manufacturer. This cannot go on.(2)

Complaints and lamentations at the surplus of labour fill the press throughout these years.(3) This surplus was greater in the winter because of the seasonal nature of the ribbon trade.(4) It was also higher in depressions that transcended seasonal fluctuations. Such a slump, caused by the influx of French ribbons, was being suffered in Coventry during the years of the Reform Bill. It

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(1) Coventry Herald, 1 August 1851.
(2) Household Words, iv (1852) pp. 485 et seq, 'Rainbow Making'.
(3) See, for some examples, Coventry Herald, 18 October, 15 November, 22 November 1833, 13 June, 4 July, 18 July 1834, 20 March 1835, 29 January 1836, 20 March 1840, 3 March 1843, 28 April 1848. Coventry Standard, 7 August, 14 August 1840, 21 May 1841, 10 March 1843, 26 January, 18 May 1855, 31 July 1857, 22 October 1858. P.P.: H.C. 341 (1835) xiii, pp. 235 et seq, 267 et seq.
(4) P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 33, 34. See, on this point, Appendix 1, which shows that between 1815 and 1860 the number of families in receipt of parochial relief was usually higher in January than in June or July.

continued in the years that followed. To French competition was added another menace - the production of ribbons, particularly plain black ribbons, by power looms in Manchester, Derby, Leek and Congleton from 1833 onwards - an event which helped to push the introduction of steam looms into Warwickshire and which meanwhile damaged the engine trade in black ribbons, Thomas Cope having to end the making of plain black ribbons on 100 of his looms in 1834.(1) Thus 1833 and 1834 were years of slump: 619 families were classed as casual outpoor in January 1833 and there were 423 one year later and 407 in January 1835; in each year the June figures were better.(2)

So in these years there were renewed efforts to secure the prohibition of the import of foreign ribbons. In July 1833, at a meeting of weavers at the George Inn, Thomas and Edward Goode, Fletcher, Taunton, and Sheffield repeated the old arguments that distress was the result of foreign competition and decided to petition parliament once more for prohibition. The weavers of Foleshill also decided to petition. Predictably, Ellice in his reply to the weavers' request for support offered little hope. Eardley Eardley Wilmot (one of the county members) and Henry Lytton Bulwer, the supporter of the campaign for prohibition the year before, wrote to the Foleshill and Coventry weavers that their petitions could not be brought on in that session, but that they would assist them in 1834.(3) In 1834 the campaign to press for prohibition began as weavers and masters were in conflict over a proposed reduction in the list of prices. At separate meetings, however, they agreed to petition for prohibition and 3,200 weavers signed theirs; weavers of all shades of political opinion supported the move. The mayor attempted unsuccessfully to persuade the reducing masters to stick to the list, and at the same time he and the corporation petitioned parliament for prohibition. The mayor also called a town meeting on the question when requested to do so by the weavers and sixty-eight leading inhabitants. At this Walter Farquhar Hook, the Vicar of Holy Trinity, Dr. Arrowsmith and Charles Woodcock - all Tories - joined Mark Pearman, Edward Goode, George

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(1) P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 10 et seq; H.C. 341 (1835) xiii, pp. 235, 260, 269. Coventry Herald, 15 November 1833, 29 August 1834, 13 February 1835.

(2) C.R.O. Proceedings of the Guardians of the Poor for the Parish of St. Michael, 1801-1861, pp. 176 et seq. See Appendix 1 for a table of poor law figures. Coventry Herald, 11 April 1834.

(3) Coventry Herald, 25 January, 26 July, 2 August 1833.

Baddeley and David Buckney - liberals and radicals of various shades of opinion - in stressing the need for prohibition to restore prosperity to the town. 1,557 inhabitants signed the petition that resulted. There were similar petitions from the weavers and inhabitants of the north Warwickshire parishes. The weavers of the city collected subscriptions in its wards to send James Perkins and David Buckney as their delegates to London to press for their petition.(1)

Henry Lytton Bulwer offered to introduce a bill to prohibit the import of foreign ribbons. Ellice wrote to the Weavers' Committee to refuse help. There was no hope that parliament could be brought to prohibit imports. In any case, prohibition could not prevent imports, because smuggling would result: it could not help the single-hand weavers of north Warwickshire, in competition not really with France (for north Warwickshire made few very fine ribbons) but chiefly with the engine-loom weavers of Coventry; it would not solve the problems caused by a continually increasing productive capacity for ribbons at home, in Warwickshire and the North, as looms grew in quantity and quality. Ellice pointed out the folly of attempting to consider Coventry's industry without reference to industries and desires for free trade elsewhere in Britain. 'We must recollect that Coventry is not the whole country; and that, even supposing the trade of Coventry would benefit to the extent some of the parties interested in it suppose, by the re-enactment of prohibition, it is vain to prosecute an application for measures to render that effective.'(2) Bulwer's motion was lost by 22 votes to 118. Ellice did not vote but spoke against the motion, stressing that prohibitory laws would not prevent smuggling and would therefore be useless; the two Tory members for North Warwickshire, Eardley Eardley Wilmot and Stratford Dugdale voted for it.(3) The weavers' delegates in London saw Ellice but got no comfort from him.(4) A few weeks later Lord Strangford suggested to the Coventry Weavers' Committee that they ought to petition to King for relief from distress. The idea was

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(1) Coventry Herald, 2 May, 9 May, 16 May, 23 May, 30 May 1834. Journals of the House of Commons, lxxxix (1834), p. 324.

(2) Coventry Herald, 6 June, 13 June 1834.

(3) Parliamentary Debates, third series, xxiv, pp. 570 et seq. Journals of the House of Commons, lxxxix (1834), p. 413.

(4) Coventry Herald, 27 June 1834.

taken up at a weavers' meeting; William Taunton and Edward Goode were despatched to the mayor to seek his co-operation. He called another public meeting. The usual array of leading citizens of Coventry, of all shades of political opinion, were united in wishing for prohibition. They were joined by clergymen from the northern parishes. The Rev. Henry Bellairs, the Tory Vicar of Bedworth, spoke misleadingly of days before the opening of the ports:

> It was in the year 1819 when he first came into this country; his parishioners were then prosperous; there were no Trade Unions; no Political Unions; the poor man was doing well and the rich man satisfactorily; at length came the accursed system of Free Trade, and stript them of every comfort; they now saw poverty without the power to relieve it.(1)

The meeting decided to petition the King to direct his ministers to relieve the distress of Coventry and district. Nothing came of this move.(2)

This was the last attempt by any group to gain prohibition: most men in Warwickshire became convinced of its hopelessness, though a desire for it lingered on for years. A meeting of weavers in 1835 who argued for it on the old grounds was plainly told by Edward Goode that all efforts to gain it would be quite vain. Ellice pointed out that most M.P.s of all parties were united on the question, and that when Stratford Dugdale saw Peel on the question he was as unhelpful to the prohibitionist cause as the Whigs. Efforts were now devoted to more feasible ends: stronger measures against smuggling and the evasion of the correct duty by false declarations of value. Early in 1835, corporation, weavers and masters submitted memorials to the Board of Trade asking for these; they were supported by the four M.P.s for the city and the northern division of the county, but the Board of Trade refused to agree to the changes asked for.(3) Smuggling and evasion remained a grievance, and in 1843 the figured weavers of Coventry demanded the destruction of seized contraband, the transportation of convicted smugglers, and the appointment of an efficient superintendent of customs. More tactfully, the ribbon manufacturers of Coventry sent a memorial to the Board of Trade mentioning the measures that had already been taken to check smuggling but asking for more: in

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(1) Coventry Herald, 11 July 1834.

(2) ibid., 4 July, 11 July 1834.

(3) Coventry Herald, 13 February, 20 March, 3 April, 10 April, 24 April, 29 May, 2 October 1835.

particular, the substitution of duties by weight instead of ad valorem (because the latter permitted evasion through false declarations of value) and the nomination of London as the only port of entry for ribbons would be helpful. Their requests were not granted, but customs procedures were tightened up, and frauds and smuggling reduced: the prosperity of the trade increased as a result.(1)

In any case, from about 1835 French competition had become less serious, as the trade began to exploit markets which, largely protected by the tariff from French competition, ensured a growing demand for Coventry ribbons. In the years after 1830 the growing popularity of French ribbons in the highest class of trade where price was of little object, though design, taste, and fashion were (and where the tariff, therefore, gave no protection to Coventry) helped to create a lower-class and middle-class trade modelled upon it, where ribbon designs were indeed most often copies from the French. Price was important in this trade. Here, therefore, the tariff did give protection, after the reductions in the lists of prices of September 1829 (which remained the maximum paid from 1831 onwards) lowered the cost of Coventry ribbons to bring them under the price of the cheaper French articles. Thus the opening of the ports was damaging in the short term and both damaging and helpful in the long. Meanwhile, though the trade in black ribbons was partly lost to the North, Coventry's expertise in the manufacture of coloured ones kept her from home competition in them. Thus the market for Coventry ribbons grew much after 1835, with occasional and exceptional booms like that for tartan ribbons in 1844 - a fashion for which the city had to thank the Highland tastes popularised by Victoria and Albert.(2)

In January 1846 the reduction in the duties on imported ribbons to fifteen per cent was part of the free trade measures introduced by Peel, who argued that the existing tariff was still high enough to encourage smuggling and thus was not truly protective.(3) The ribbon manufacturers of the city registered a formal protest but did not petition - recognising, they said, that the change was irresistible. The weavers and the inhabitants at large of the city said

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(1) Coventry Standard, 10 March, 28 July, 8 September, 27 October 1843, 4 April, 27 September 1844. Coventry Herald, 15 September 1843.

(2) Coventry Herald, 29 August 1834, 8 May 1835, 10 July 1840, 29 September 1843. Coventry Standard, 7 August, 14 August 1840, 28 October 1842, 11 October 1844. P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 15 et seq.

(3) Parliamentary Debates, third series, lxxxiii, pp. 247 et seq.

or did nothing. The town council congratulated Peel on his measures, including the reductions in tariffs on imported manufactures the only note of fear over the future of the ribbon trade being sounded by David Buckney.(1) In the Commons Ellice welcomed the measures on behalf of his constituents, arguing that the existing duty was too high and offered an inducement to the smuggler and that the cheaper food that would follow Corn Law repeal would be of great benefit to the ribbon trade: he asked merely that the operation of the reduced tariff should be delayed till July. When Peel refused this Ellice continued to support the reductions, voting for them when C.N. Newdegate, the Tory M.P. for North Warwickshire, joined with others in an attempt to negative them. They became effective on the passing of the resolution in their favour on 21 March.(2)

In the debates Peel remarked that Coventry would be 'more interfered with by the alteration of duty than any other town'.(3) The absence of the protectionist sentiment so prevalent in the city fifteen years before was bemoaned by the Coventry Standard, welcomed by the Herald, and requires explanation. Partly it was that the new duties were ad valorem; Peel removed the trade's objection to the old tariff - that duties on value enabled the fraudulent to escape the true duty by false declarations. More important was the concurrent repeal of the Corn Laws, which for many greatly sugared the pill. But when all qualifications are made the acquiescence of the trade and town in reduced protection for ribbons was a tribute to the greatly increased prosperity since 1831, which even the Standard admitted, though it credited it to the growth of railways, better taxes, the end of Whig foreign policy, and the stronger customs control: these mitigated the effects of foreign imports.(4)

The demand for ribbons continued to grow after 1846, and throughout the 1850s as national purchasing power grew. Coventry's prosperity grew too, the industry continuing to cater for the middle

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(1) Coventry Standard, 13 February, 20 February, 27 March 1846.

(2) Parliamentary Debates, third series, lxxxiii, pp. 493, 1287 et seq, lxxxiv, pp. 1068 et seq. Journals of the House of Commons, ci (1846-1847), p. 378. The new duties are listed ibid., pp. 321 et seq.; they were ad valorem, ranging from 6s. to 14s. 1b, according to type and quality. 9 & 10 Vict., Cap.23, An Act to alter certain duties of Customs, which received the royal assent in June, gave statutory form to the resolution.

(3) Parliamentary Debates, third series, lxxxiii, p. 493.

(4) Coventry Standard, 13 February, 20 February, 13March, 20 March 1846. Coventry Herald, 13 February 1846.

and lower class with cheap ribbons whose designs were copies from the French - an expedient necessary because French fashions ruled the taste of all markets. Only very exceptionally - as in the case of the special ribbon designed by Thomas Clack for the 1851 Exhibition, of which copies were afterwards sold to the rich women of Bath - did Coventry break into the upper-class trade with a design of its own. The upper-class trade remained dominated by genuine French ribbons.(1) 'Coventry makes for the million.'(2) 'The last ten years', wrote the Coventry Herald in 1851, 'shows a state of yearly increasing prosperity in Coventry, and its working classes have probably been better off than most other towns in the kingdom ... while men in their over-grown confidence and puffed-up conceit, resulting from a great demand for labour, have been writing to their masters, wishing them "furder in hell than a piggin fly"'.(3) 'From the low price of provisions,' wrote Harriet Martineau in the same year, 'multitudes have something more to spare from their weekly wages than formerly, for the purchase of finery: and the demand has increased wonderfully'.(4) The growth and prosperity continued in later years: and is clearly reflected in the increase in productive capacity in them.(5)

Nevertheless, in the twenty-five years after 1835 the industry continued to suffer periodic slumps, of varying degrees of intensity, that transcended merely seasonal fluctuations. Such depressions are recorded for the spring of 1837, the period from the late autumn of 1840 to the spring of 1843, most of 1847 and the first few months of 1848, the autumn of 1854 and the first two or three months of 1855, the last five months of 1857, and the spring of 1858.(6)

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(1) Coventry Herald, 1 March 1850, 1 August, 31 October 1851, 11 March 1853. Coventry Watchman, 13 July 1850. Clack was the star pupil of the Coventry School of Design.
(2) Coventry Herald, 12 March 1858.
(3) ibid., 1 August 1851. Piggin seems to mean pigeon.
(4) 'Rainbow Making', Household Words, iv (1852) p. 490.
(5) Coventry Herald, 9 December 1853, 26 September 1856. Coventry Standard, 3 December 1852, 5 April 1855, P.P.: [1712] H.C. (1854) xix: Reports of Inspectors of Factories for the Half-Year ending 31 October 1853, p. 25.
(6) Coventry Standard, 14 April, 21 April 1837, 23 October 1840, 21 January, 26 November, 24 December, 31 December 1841, 19 March 1847, 21 January, 24 March 1848, 2 February, 9 February 1855, 21 August, 13 November, 27 November, 11 December 1857. Coventry Herald, 19 November 1841, 1 July 1842, 3 February 1843, 24 September 1847, 1 September 1854, 16 February 1855, 13 November, 27 November, 11 December 1857, 12 March, 30 April 1858.

Catastrophic slump preceded and followed the great crisis of 1860.

This pattern - of growing prosperity for twenty-five years after 1835, punctuated by periodic slumps and culminating in a disastrous one - is only obscurely reflected in the poor law figures, because of the cryptic nature of the statistics and, even more importantly, changes in poor law policy.(1) This was becoming steadily less liberal before 1844; it became more so thereafter. Nevertheless, the depression of spring 1837 is reflected in the high number of casual outpoor families in June and in the rise in 'cravings' for non-payment of rates. Similarly, the dramatic rise in the inpoor and outpoor figures in 1841 and 1842, the numbers of relief in the summer of 1842 and January 1843 equalling those in January 1835, shows the effect of the slump of those years: just as the rise in cravings in 1848 and the high inpoor and outpoor figures for January 1848 do for the slump of that year. By then the stringent policy that followed 1844 had been fully applied, and the downward movement of all figures till 1855 doubtless reflected the prosperity of the early 1850s. The accounts that end at Michaelmas 1855 reveal graphically the effects of the slump of 1854-55; there were pronounced rises in rates, amounts raised, cravings, payments for inpoor and outpoor and numbers in the house of industry - the number of outpoor as compared with earlier years being hard to discover owing to the change from families to persons as the base for computation. The near-doubling of the number on relief, between September 1857 and March 1858, seems to reflect the slump of spring 1858. Finally, the disastrous slump that followed the crisis of 1860 shows starkly in the inpoor and outpoor figures for September 1861. There were then more people in the workhouse than at any time since January 1848, and even on the most optimistic assumption, more people on out-relief than at any time since January 1833.(2)

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(1) See Chapter Nine for poor law policy and Appendix 1 for the figures of poor relief. Figures for those in the house of industry and for the casual outpoor are available only for selected months which do not always correspond with the centres of the slumps, as suggested by the press, and casual outpoor are not distinguished from permanent outpoor after 1844.

(2) Until 1855 the numbers of outpoor were given in families; after then, in persons. There were 164 outpoor families in January 1854 and 268 out-paupers in March 1855, when all indications are that this was a time of grave slump. It is thus very cautious to divide the number of persons by 2 to give the approximate number of families involved. On this assumption, there were 1,270 outpoor families in September 1861.

IV

Wages, hours and work-discipline

In the slumps which disrupted periodically the twenty-five years of prosperity after 1835, the list of prices was often breached and earnings in the Coventry trade fell drastically; thus in February 1841 a plain engine journeyman's journeyman weaver in the city could earn only 6s. a week after loom-hire and standing had been paid.(1) But for most of the period the plain list of 1835 was adhered to in the city, and the same man would earn, after payments for loom-rent, loom-standing and 'fetching and carrying' which the first-hand deducted from his pay, about 9s.6d. a week on the engine loom when in full work. The first-hand earned about 1s. a week more on each loom worked by his family, after allowance had been made for the interest on his capital tied up in looms,(2) and for the extra house-rent and cash for fire and light made necessary by them. In the outdoor jacquard trade earnings were more precarious, since for most of the period between 1830 and 1860 there was no regular jacquard list, and earnings fluctuated more than in the plain trade because of the competition of country weavers, because of the greater variety in skill in the fancy trade, and because of the periods of unpaid work forced on the figure weaver by the need to change patterns, but the average earnings of a first-hand jacquard in full work in the late 1830s were 13s.6d. a week net (after deducting the interest on his loom and other expenses(3) for each loom worked by a member of his family. His journeyman's journeyman earned about 10s.6d. a week.

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(1) Coventry Standard, 5 February 1841.

(2) A new plain engine loom cost between £8 and £12. P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 276.

(3) A new jacquard cost between £16 and £24. P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 276.

George Baddeley warned Joseph Fletcher about the difficulty of estimating average earnings even in the plain trade, even under the list: 'there are great variety of earnings, depending partly on individual skill, and partly on the prices of the several fabrics, their difficulty, and the quality of the materials. There is a great difference in expertness from natural causes and from habits.'(1) The difficulty of striking averages was greater in the jacquard branch. Nevertheless, when all qualifications are made it is clear that in the years of prosperity that predominated after 1835 the families of the first-hands who worked three quarters of the plain and jacquard looms in the outdoor trade enjoyed quite high incomes. Almost two thirds (over 1,100) of the first-hands owned more than one loom and it was usual for wives and children to work them. Thus a man like Edward Goode would earn, with his wife working his other plain engine loom, about 21s. a week in full work. The earnings of a family of skilful jacquard weavers would be higher, but more precarious. The families who had incomes of 21s. a week or more (in good times) exceeded greatly the number of journeyhands (822 in 1838) working for first-hands at 9s.6d. a week or more - and the family incomes of the latter were often higher than that because both husband and wife were weavers. The list of 1835 was lower than all previous ones since 1816, but the plain weavers (at least) prospered under this list more than under the others, partly because the 1835 list was kept for most of the twenty-five years after its promulgation whereas the others had been broken.(2)

In the late 1830s all the Coventry loom-shop proprietors (except Day) paid their weavers by the piece. Four fifths of the loom-shop looms were jacquards, and as in the outdoor trade rates varied greatly, about 13s. being the maximum after deductions for loom-rent and loom-standing. Day's jacquard weavers were paid 20s. a week but were expected to work far harder for it, while the 'pickers-up' who were an essential part of his system received 9s. a week. The half-pay apprentices in the loom-shops received about 5s.6d. a week, and the female winders and warpers averaged about 7s. and 10s. a week respectively.(3)

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(1) P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 277. In the plain trade weavers would earn far more weaving satins than weaving sarsnets, a larger branch of the trade; ibid., p. 276. But weavers moved of course from one type of ribbon to another.
(2) P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 39 et seq., 274 et seq: H.C. 341 (1835) xiii, p. 233. For the fortunes of the list of prices, see Chapter Six.
(3) P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 279 et seq.

In the country weaving areas, where the labour surplus was most marked, all earnings were lower. The journeymen in the Bedworth jacquard loom-shops were the most fortunate, but they received, under the list which their masters carefully calculated to enable them to undersell the Coventry figured trade, between about 9s. and 12s. a week net. Similar hands in Nuneaton were paid less - between 8s. and 9s. a week net, by the piece. The single-hand weavers of north Warwickshire were paid 5s. a week at most, and sometimes little more than 4s. net.(1)

The introduction in the city in the 1840s and 1850s of steam looms of increasing productiveness meant that the wages of factory weavers rose steadily in a period of general prosperity. In March 1843 I. and B. Sansom offered 16s. a week set wages to figure weavers, with a bonus of up to as much again for hands who exceeded the norm of one half-length (18 yards) per week.(2) One year later J. and C. Ratliff paid 13s. a week to plain weavers in their factory.(3) In 1848 Cope and Hammerton were paying weekly wages to the male plain and figured weavers in their factory of between 10s. and 16s. a week; more than two-thirds received between 12s. and 14s. a week. Fillers and pickers-up were paid between 7s. and 9s., winders between 7s.6d. and 12s.6d., apparently according to age.(4) In 1853 Spencer and Horsfall paid 14s. a week to factory weavers, raised this to 15s. during the course of the year, tried to reduce wages to 14s. early in 1854, but offered 15s. to attract fresh hands when their own refused the lower rates.(5) But in 1855 factory wages were still said to vary between 12s. and 14s. a week.(6)

The great rise in the wages of factory weavers began in the mid-1850s, with the rapid introduction of vastly more productive looms. In the booming summer of 1856 the Cash brothers were paying

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(1) ibid., pp. 280 et seq; H.C. 341 (1835) xiii, p. 252.

(2) Coventry Standard, 17 March 1843. The normal production for a handloom jacquard weaver was also one half-length per week, but this would contain fewer widths of ribbon than a steam jacquard of many shuttles. P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 283.

(3) Coventry Herald, 10 May 1844.

(4) Coventry Herald and Coventry Standard, 28 April 1848. C.W.C.: Broadsides Collection, To the Tradesmen ... of the City of Coventry, 27 April 1848.

(5) Coventry Standard, 10 February, 17 February 1854.

(6) Coventry Herald, 27 April 1855.

between 14s. and 17s. weekly wages to their factory weavers and 10s. to the pickers-up; they were then the highest wages in the trade. But the hands of the six leading factory owners (the 'Bunch of Six' of the 1858 lock-out) won between 1855 and 1858 three wage increases because of increased productivity and by 1858 were earning between 20s. and 22s. a week, with premiums, and Hart's weavers at the Victoria factory earned 23s. or 24s.(1)

While weekly wages in factories generally improved in the 1840s and 1850s the list of prices in the plain trade remained that of 1835, and earnings outdoor remained static: for, that is, those whose looms stayed the same. This helps to explain the growing hostility to the factory among outdoor weavers at this time. When the great improvement in large factory looms began in the mid-1850s the outdoor weavers responded to the menace of even greater competitiveness with the a-la-bar loom. Whether worked by turning-boy or steam this was so much more productive than the engine-loom that earnings by the list in the outdoor trade shot up. The net earnings of a first-hand weaver with two a-la-bar looms in full work by the list, with weaving but not ancillary labour provided by his family, were about £3.10s. a week and £175 a year. Other a-la-bar loom first-hands were even more favourably circumstanced.(2) Even the journeymen weavers employed sometimes by these a-la-bar loom proprietors earned considerably more than the engine-loom journeymen of twenty years before - 15s. as against

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(1) Coventry Herald, 26 September 1856. Coventry Standard, 3 September, 10 September 1858. It is probable that by the later date Cash's too were paying the higher rates since their factory was highly productive; the brothers prevaricated during the lock-out. C. Bray, The Industrial Employment of Women, (London, 1857), p. 7, says that in one ribbon factory of 279 persons the wages of men averaged 16s.6d. and of women (warpers, winders and pickers-up) 9s.6d.; but he does not say when his survey was carried out or what type of factory it was.

(2) See the letter of 'Consistency' in Coventry Herald, 3 August 1860. The gross earnings of one a-la-bar loom are given as about £2. 14s. a week. From this should be deducted the cost of the loom (1s.6d. a week through the A-la-bar Loom Society) and perhaps 6s. or 6s.6d. a week for steam or the wages of a turning-boy and the rent for the extra house-room needed to accommodate a large loom. Also, in this example pickers-up and fillers (one each for each loom) were paid 7s.6d. and 4s. a week respectively. Total deductions thus equalled about 19s. a week and net earnings £1.15s., for each loom. Earnings for proprietors whose families supplied ancillary labour would of course be greater: those for proprietors employing journeymen weavers at 15s. a week, of course less. Those fof 'honourable' owners paying hired labour by the list would be less too. These variables show the difficulty of estimating average earnings in the ribbon trade. An owner of six a-la-bar looms, two worked completely by his family, and the others by hired labour, would be an extreme example. His family's net income, when in full work and paid by the list, would be just under £9 a week. 'Consistency' added that the a-la-bar loom owners 'stand in the same relation to the hands they employ as a fat pluralist

9s.6d., though their weekly wages were much less than those of the weavers in the largest conventional factories. The a-la-bar loom owners were the aristocrats of the outdoor trade but the rise in earnings from the mid-1850s onwards was shared by others in Coventry. It was almost certainly shared by weavers in north Warwickshire too; the spread of the weavers' trade union organisation there in the late 1850s, led to the gaining of the list there too.(1)

Since the engine-list of 1835 was so much lower than that of 1819, a journeyman weaver in full work on the engine-loom earned much less by the later list than by the earlier - 9s.6d. as against about 17s. The earnings of the first-hands employing them were slightly greater but fell by similar proportions - as those of jacquard weavers seem to have done for that part of the period (after 1823) that they existed in Coventry.(2) But in real terms the fall was certainly much less dramatic, since prices dropped by one quarter or perhaps one third over the same period.(3) Much more importantly, the number of engine-looms of both types (plain and jacquard) in the city and suburbs increased between 1818 and 1838 from 2260 to 4730, while the number of single-hand looms fell to 129.(4) Thus within these twenty years the opportunity to gain the much higher earnings provided by the engine-loom (as against the single-hand loom) doubled. A weaver who stayed with the engine-loom from 1819 to 1835 certainly earned less in real terms at the end than at the beginning; but a weaver who graduated during that time from the single-hand loom to the engine-loom was receiving by the end of it (again at full work by the list) wages greater by several shillings and considerably higher in real terms.(5)

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to his lank, starving curates'. But of course any departure from the list, or cessation of work, would severely reduce their high earnings while leaving the first-hands with the burden of paying for looms, workshops and steam.

(1) See Chapter Six, Section I, and Chapter Eleven.
(2) P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 288 et seq; H.C. 678 (1831-32) xix, p. 54.
(3) The Gayer, Rostow and Schwartz price-indices show a general decline from 128.1 to 84.5 between 1819 and 1835 (the monthly average of 1821-25 being 100); the Rousseaux indices show a general decline from 147 to 112 (the average of 1865 and 1885 being 100). Both sets of indices cover a wide range of goods, but the latter set is unweighted while the former gives very great emphasis to the price of food. B.R. Mitchell and P. Deane, Abstract of British Historical Statistics (Cambridge, 1962), pp. 465 et seq.
(4) See Tables III and IV.
(5) The earnings of single-hand weavers when on the list appear to have been at best about 7s. a week in 1819. P.P. [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 284 et seq.

Real wages fluctuated in the twenty-five years after 1835. Prices were higher in the six years after 1835, reaching a peak in 1839 and 1840, when they were one fifth or one sixth above the levels of that year.(1) From 1842 to 1848 prices were about the same as in 1835, or rather lower, except in 1847.(2) From 1849 to 1852 prices were consistently lower than in 1835 (the best year appearing to be 1851, with prices one sixth lower) but in 1853 they reached the level of 1835 again. The years from 1854 to 1857 showed price-levels considerably above those of 1835, the peak being 1857, with prices then one seventh higher. Prices fell to the level of 1835 in 1858 and 1859, and rose above it - by about one fourteenth - in 1860.(3) Thus an engine-loom weaver on the 1835 list was much worse off in the late-1830s (especially 1839 and 1840) than he had been in 1835, considerably better off in 1851, and marginally worse off in 1860. But once again, as in the period between 1819 and 1835, advancing technology made it increasingly unlikely that he would remain on the engine-loom: particularly from the mid-1850s onwards. Men turning to factory labour from 1843 to 1855, and commonly earning 12s. or 13s. a week (or one third more than on the engine-loom) enjoyed an increase in real wages that greatly outweighed the rise in prices (as against the level of 1835) in 1847 or even 1854 and 1855. Though prices remained high for the next two years, factory wages went up too, quite dramatically, and continued to rise after the drop in prices in 1858. Thus by 1858 or 1859 the real wages of a weaver in one of the most productive factories were more than double those of a plain-engine journeyman weaver in 1835 - money wages being more than twice as great and the cost of living the same. Those who remained in the outdoor trade had no technological advance to

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(1) The Gayer indices show prices being at 104.3 in 1839 and 102.5 in 1840, as against 84.5 in 1835, and the Rousseaux indices show a rise from 112 in 1835 to 130 in 1839 and 128 in 1840. 1841 prices were lower than these, though greater than in 1835, at 97.7 (Gayer) and 121 (Rousseaux). Mitchell and Deane, op. cit., pp. 470 et seq.

(2) The Gayer indices show prices at 96.8 in 1847, but Rousseaux 115 only. loc. cit.

(3) The Gayer indices show prices at 81.8 in 1848, 73.9 in 1849, and 73.5 in 1850. These indices then cease. The Rousseaux indices show prices at 100 in 1848, and varying between 1849 and 1852 from 95 to 91 (in 1851). After a level of 112 in 1853, they reached 125 in the next two years, 124 in 1856, and 127 in 1857. In 1858 and 1859 they were 111 and 115, and in 1860, 120. loc. cit.

augment their real earnings till the 1850s: but when the a-la-bar loom was then adopted in quantity the earnings of the most fortunate rose greatly. The owner of two engine-looms earning 21s. a week by family labour in 1835 was earning £3.10s. by the same means by 1858 or 1859, if he had exchanged his engine-looms for a-la-bar looms: his real earnings were more than three times those of 1835. And even their least fortunate employees, the 'lank, starving curates' paid by weekly wages of 15s. a week, had real wages greater even in the dear years of the mid-1850s than they had been on the engine-loom.(1)

But any discussion of real wages is unhelpful which omits two chief determinants of prosperity or distress: whether or no the list of prices was paid, and (a related variable) whether work existed at any price. In the 1850s there was certainly, until the very end of the decade, less unemployment and fewer abatements of the list, than in the 1820s, 1830s or 1840s: and since at the same time there was a rise in real incomes for many weavers in work at the list, the period 1850-1859 was more prosperous for the weavers than any before. But in the spring of 1860 the most productive looms were idle and the list of prices widely disregarded: disastrous slump had once more hit the ribbon trade. It was followed by an even more disastrous strike and a worse slump. The prosperity of the trade was always precarious.

In the late 1830s the Coventry Weavers' Committee told Joseph Fletcher that in the city's outdoor trade 'the men work more hours when they have work to do, than those in any other handicraft, unless it be the tailors. On Monday morning they do not begin before breakfast, and leave off at "club-time":(2) but on other evenings they work until 9 o'clock, which is reckoned the weavers' giving-over hour.'(3) Edward Goode estimated the usual daily hours of work as twelve all year round, and James Jenkins, a ribbon

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(1) In this comparison of the fortunes of the outwork trade at different dates, much turns on the relative number of looms of various types. William Andrews, Papers relating to the Ribbon Trade (Coventry, 1878), p. 18, quotes a census taken in 1860 to the effect that there were 3412 a-la-bar looms and 1052 engine-looms in weavers' houses; the figures were said to be incomplete but the proportions may be taken as accurate. Thus the greater part of the outdoor trade in the city was on the a-la-bar loom by the end of the 1850s.

(2) That is, the time to attend friendly and benefit societies.

(3) P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 282.

master, as twelve in the summer and ten and a half in the winter.(1) Outdoor weavers did not enjoy short hours, but appreciated the ability to work them when they chose and to take short intervals of leisure in the day if they wished. This was one of the reasons why they hardly ever resorted to the 'separate picking-up' system, since to be fully profitable it forced constant labour on both weaver and picker-up; and because there was already employment for wives in looms or at warping and winding, a good picker-up had to be paid between 7s. and 9s. a week and so the extra income brought by the system was not worth the uninterrupted work it entailed.(2) 'Separate picking-up' was of necessity introduced into the outdoor trade with the heavy a-la-bar loom, and the loom's motive-power, whether steam or manual, had to be paid for: thus the cottage factory increased for outdoor weavers the financial penalty of working when they chose. Nevertheless, in 1859 they still took time off, chartering special trains to take them to Warwick races for the day, for example.(3)

In the 1830s, the loom-shop weavers of the city worked long hours - about 60 - but took at least as much freedom over them as the outdoor hands. 'The men are not tied to very close hours: being paid by the piece, they are at liberty to idle a little at the commencement of the week, and to make it up towards the end,' said Mrs. Dresser.(4) The half-pay apprentices and 'others of the least respectable class of the community' who at this time formed such a large proportion of the loom-shop work-force were even more erratic, turning up very late on Monday and weaving 1 yard of their 18 yards weekly stint, another 2 on Tuesday, 4 on Wednesday and finishing the rest by weaving till 10 p.m. on Friday night. 'Young single fellows', complained Browne, a master with 40 looms in his shop, 'can scarcely be got together on Tuesday: but a few

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(1) P.P.: H.C. 341 (1835) xiii, pp. 244, 276.

(2) P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 50, 283: the extra profit of a picker-up to a weaver in the figure trade was about 3s. a week in full work; slack time would of course remove the financial advantage of a picker-up completely.

(3) Thomas Goadby, Six Lectures to the People of Coventry, (Coventry, 1859), p. 14. The outdoor weavers of north Warwickshire worked much more irregularly than those of the city, being idle all Monday, starting late on Tuesday, and weaving sometimes all Friday night. P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 285 et seq.

(4) P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 283.

steady men set an example of working hard on Monday, which is little followed'.(1) Only Day kept his hands 'rigidly to factory hours', and to constant work within them by his separate picking-up system: in return for the very high weekly wages which were so little appreciated.(2)

As the steam-factory system grew in the 1840s and 1850s the hours of work were reduced, from 63 to 58 a week in 1848, but the freedom to work within them was necessarily eroded, steam power itself being of course the chief reason for the imposition of factory discipline. Factory clocks were installed and workers compelled to work to them. Overlookers were appointed. The picking-up system - at first the characteristic only of Day's weekly paying system - became common to both weekly paying and piece-paying factories: it was necessary to maximise the profitability of expensive looms and power. This helps to explain the acceptance by the weavers of the weekly wage system they had at first opposed; it now entailed no worse discipline than payment by the piece. And the increasing rigour of factory discipline as a whole helps to account for the steady growth in opposition to the factories among the outdoor weavers.(3)

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(1) ibid., pp. 47, 282 et seq. The hands in the Bedworth loom-shops enjoyed similar freedom.

(2) ibid., p. 284.

(3) Coventry Standard, 28 April 1848, 2 June 1854, 26 September 1856, 10 September 1858. Coventry Herald, 26 September 1856. Coventry Weekly Times, 22 September 1858.

CHAPTER SIX

THE FORTUNES OF THE WEAVERS, 1832-1859

I

The Weavers' Trades Unions

The implications of the chronic surplus of labour for the list of prices were made clear by David Buckney, ribbon weaver and radical, in September 1834: 'If this list is destroyed, all the surplus hands will be brought into immediate competition with those in work - underworking each other till we shall all be brought down to starvation level'.(1) All groups of weavers in Warwickshire thus had a strong motive to organise powerful trades unions to enforce the list. Coventry had for many years had a weavers' committee, and although little can be discovered about its organisation the events of the 1820s show that it was a powerful body with much influence in the trade. There were weavers' committees in the ribbon townships of north Warwickshire too - at Nuneaton, Bedworth and Foleshill, for example. They tended to have little contact with the Coventry committee, or often indeed with each other; their organisation was feebler than the city's, since the weaving population was so dispersed in the north of the county, and entry to the trade so easy. It was partly owing to this weakness of organisation that by 1833 the single-hand list of November 1831 was lost in north Warwickshire, never to be regained. Clews, a Nuneaton weaver, said to Joseph Fletcher in

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(1) Coventry Herald, 19 September 1834.

1838 that he could not

> account for it how it is that the single-hand weavers have lost their list of prices, while the plain engine weavers of Coventry have maintained theirs, but believes it to arise from the latter being more united and living all in one place, while the single-hand weavers live dispersed, and have no common understanding.(1)

Soon after the single-hand list was lost in 1833 an attempt was made in Warwickshire at forming a wide trade union. It came in the autumn of 1833, when the idea of a national union was in the air and several areas were reaching towards one.(2) The proximate cause in Warwickshire seems to have been the strike of Derby silkweavers in November. A few weeks later William Taunton, the Coventry radical, was active in helping to initiate a trade union that aimed at uniting all weavers - in Warwickshire and beyond, and with the maintenance of the local list of prices as one of its chief aims.(3) In December, when the weavers of Coventry were busy collecting money for the Derby strikers and were joining the union in numbers, an agent for Thomas Bridgett, one of the Derby manufacturers, was so foolish as to visit Coventry to recruit blacklegs: 'much to the discomfiture and chagrin of the miscreant, not one individual could be found willing to lend himself to so base an act'. A crowd of women and children chased him from Hillfields, 'hissing, hooting, and pelting him with mud'.(4) In the first few months of 1834 the union's organisation spread throughout north Warwickshire. Coventry had many lodges. Foleshill had ten (and a female branch), Bedworth and district four (and a female branch too), Nuneaton and district twelve. All these branches met at public houses, the general committee of the Coventry lodges meeting at the chief radical inn, the George. William Fletcher, the weavers' leader, was secretary.(5)

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(1) P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 234. See also ibid., pp. 223 et seq.

(2) W.H. Oliver, 'The Consolidated Trades' Union of 1834', Economic History Review, second series, xvii, i, p. 78.

(3) Coventry Herald, 13 December, 20 December 1833.

(4) Pioneer, 21 December 1833.

(5) ibid., 29 March 1834. Coventry Herald, 7 February 1834. See also the letter of 'An Initiated Weaver's Wife' in Pioneer, 15 March 1834, on the need for female lodges. For a hostile account of the initiation ceremony, by a repentant unionist, see J.C. Farn, 'The Autobiography of a Living Publicist', Reasoner, 30 September 1857. Delegates from the lodges met at the George Inn in July and decided to join the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union. Coventry Herald, 4 July 1834.

The union devoted much energy to raising funds for the Derby strikers - Coventry being singled out for special praise by the Pioneer for its efforts. £142 were raised by April, £79 coming from Coventry itself and the rest from the northern areas.(1) In February the union was closely involved in a weavers' dispute with their old enemy, John Day.(2) In the same month, the ninety union members at the dye-house of John Dalton went on strike to attempt to force him to have a union shop.(3) The zenith of the union's activity came in April - protests against the sentences given to the Dorchester labourers. The committee petitioned against these from the George Inn.(4) The mayor and magistrates, hearing that a great parade was also being organised by the committee, issued a proclamation warning against taking part in the procession and against any breach of the peace. The procession had the magistrates' 'decided disapprobation'. All constables were summoned for duty on the day of the procession and Lieutenant-colonel Ewart was asked to hold his troops in readiness for action.(5) On Monday 14 April 3000 unionists and their families, from the lodges of the union in Coventry and district, assembled at Gosford Green and then went in procession to Greyfriars Green (by the longest way round) with bands of music, and banners bearing the legends 'A tear for the Injured Unionists of Dorchester', 'Peace on earth, goodwill towards men' and 'O Lord, have mercy upon us, for man would swallow us up'. On Greyfriars Green all concurred in demanding a pardon for the Dorchester labourers. There was disagreement on a further programme, as the meeting's confused deliberations showed. Some wanted political action, others merely economic action; some wanted to end the existing system of society, and others thought that the union could achieve advance without aiming at fundamental change.(6)

The account of this discussion is disappointingly cryptic.

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(1) Pioneer, 21 December 1833, 4 January, 18 January, 1 February, 8 February, 1 March, 29 March, 12 April 1834. The account mentioned includes, besides those of the weavers, contributions from the bricklayers, joiners and sawyers of Coventry. It is not clear whether they were members of the same lodges as the weavers or were separately organised.

(2) For this dispute see Section II of this chapter.

(3) Coventry Herald, 7 March 1834. P.R.O.: H.O. 52/25, W. Hawkes to Melbourne, 20 February, 1834.

(4) The Pioneer, 5 April 1834.

(5) P.R.O.: H.O. 40/32, Ewart to Thom, 12 April 1834, H.O. 52/25, Hawkes to Melbourne, 14 April 1834, and Proclamation of the Mayor and Magistrates, 12 April 1834.

(6) Coventry Herald, 18 April 1834. P.R.O.: H.O. 52/25, The Route of the Procession, 12 April 1834. The meeting dispersed entirely peacefully: P.R.O.: H.O. 40/32, Thom to S.M. Phillips, 15 April 1834.

Nevertheless, it points to a dilemma at the heart of all weavers' movements in Coventry. The men who were prominent in the union - as commonly in weavers' movements before it and after it - were political radicals: David Buckney, David Smith, William Taunton, George Baddeley, William Fletcher, Thomas and Joseph Perkins, Edward and Thomas Goode. Yet many weavers were Tories. It was necessary not to alienate them. Even more necessary was it not to alienate the magistrates and other members of the city establishment whose influence was exerted on the weavers' behalf in times of distress. The union of 1834 was feared by the magistrates, quite unlike other associations of weavers: and the Tolpuddle protest meeting gave it a tone far more radical than the other associations. Yet even with respect to this union William Taunton and Edward Goode were careful to stress, in revealing letters to the Herald, that its chief aim was the preservation of the list of prices in the interests of all weavers and of honourable masters too, that Tory weavers were very welcome to join, that it was not a revolutionary organisation.(1)

The dilemma was crudely exposed a few months later. Some masters reduced their prices for labour; their action threatened a general lowering; the weavers went on strike. David Buckney, that most indiscreet and vehement of Coventry radicals, argued that if the lists were reduced the weavers of the city should combine in a refusal to pay all local rates, and in an attempt to obtain a twenty-five per cent reduction in rents and shopkeepers' prices. The longer aim should be the gaining of political power by the working class - without which any true progress was impossible. But even Buckney's radical colleagues, David Smith and Edward Goode, refused to support him. In face of widespread opposition, Buckney withdrew his motion. The weavers decided instead on Edward Goode's suggestion to ask the mayor to convene a town's meeting to discuss the crisis and bring pressure to bear on delinquent manufacturers. This move was successful; the list (with some amendment) held; the strike ended.(2)

By the time that Buckney made his unfortunate suggestion the union of Warwickshire weavers had sunk without trace - being doubtless dragged down by the collapse of the Grand National Consolidated Trades'

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(1) Coventry Herald, 17 January, 21 February, 18 April 1834.

(2) Coventry Herald, 29 August, 5 September 1834. See also Section II of this chapter on this episode.

Union in the summer of 1834 - a collapse which was indeed taking place as the Warwickshire union joined it in July.(1) North Warwickshire was left with its meagre and ill co-ordinated network of weavers' committees. In the city the old weavers' committee reappeared too, but showed its energy and spirit by collecting for Joseph Fletcher the immensely detailed statistics on the Coventry trade which he used in his report, while the lack of equally weighty material for north Warwickshire seems to be a reflection of the weakness of the weavers' organisation there.(2)

In the 1840s more formal trade unions were created. The older weavers' committee was felt to be inadequate, apparently because it lacked any effective organisation for the creation of funds. During the slump in the trade in 1842 the Coventry Labour Protection Society was formed for weavers in the plain branch - the largest group in the city - to protect the list of prices, partly by publishing the names of weavers who accepted, or masters who offered, work below the list price. The union soon came to be called the Plain Ribbon Weavers' Association; often the word 'plain' was omitted. Its general secretary from 1842 onwards was Daniel Butler. There was a general committee for the association, elected for six months at a time; every member of the association was bound to serve if called upon. Semi-annual meetings of the association were held at the George Inn, Little Park Street. There was also at least one 'festival' for the association as a whole in St. Mary's Hall, which was decorated with evergreens for the occasion. The association had sixteen branches, each comprising all weavers in a district - for example, the Hillfields, Much Park Street and Gosford Street branches. Each branch had its own secretary, treasurer and collectors of subscriptions. The general committee was provided by the branches with the money it needed, and was accountable to them for its expenditure. Balance sheets were made out every three months and could be inspected by members at branch meetings. Normal subscriptions were inadequate to provide strike pay for a major strike or even a minor one that went on for a long time. In the first two and a half years only £436 were collected; yet in 1846 supporting the hands of one firm, J. and C. Ratliff, while they were on strike against him for two months

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(1) W.H. Oliver, op. cit., p.94.

(2) P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 11 et seq, 223 et seq.

for refusing to pay the usual price for purl edges, cost £200. This money was raised, in part at least, by a special strike levy on members.(1)

The figured (or fancy) weavers - the jacquard trade - formed a similar organisation shortly after the plain weavers; 200 men and women were enrolled immediately and within a few months there were 800 or 900 members. But this union seems not to have lasted for long.(2) In 1848 the increasing number of factories in the city was reflected in the formation of a union, on the same plan as the Plain Weavers' Association, for the factory operatives and the outdoor jacquard weavers. At first this union was not organised efficiently as was admitted by one of its leaders, W. Housiaux; but in 1850 the continued example of the success of the Plain Weavers' Association led to the formation of a lasting and more tightly-knit union, the Factory Operatives' Association: which despite its name seems to have included once again the outdoor jacquard weavers. This apparently anomalous conjunction reflects the fact that all figured weavers, no matter whether they worked in factories or outdoors, had common interests that bound them closely together. Exactly the same was true of the plain weavers and indeed all weavers. Comprehension of this truth led to cooperation between the two unions, and in 1856, during a period of rapid structural change in the industry, to the realisation that a common union would be of great advantage to all parts of the trade. The proposal for amalgamation came from the Factory Operatives' Association. A special meeting was called in St. Mary's Hall to discuss the question: the meeting resolved that it was 'convinced of the necessity of an amalgamation of every branch of the ribbon trade in Coventry in one consolidated union, for the purpose of protecting each others' interests'.(3) The committee of the Factory Operatives' Association was instructed to negotiate with the General Committee of the Plain Weavers' Association the formation of one union.(4)

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(1) Coventry Standard, 5 February 1841, 20 May, 18 November 1842, 26 May, 8 December 1843, 15 November 1844, 16 January 1846, 15 June 1849, 7 March 1851, 23 April 1852, 19 May 1854, 17 August 1855, 4 September, 2 October, 16 October 1857. Coventry Herald, 17 March, 24 March, 18 August, 8 December 1843, 1 March, 16 August, 22 November 1844, 2 August 1850, 22 October 1858. P.P.: H.C.307 (1860) xxii: Report of the Select Committee on Masters and Operatives, together with the Minutes of Evidence, p. 93.

(2) Coventry Standard, 18 November 1842. Coventry Herald, 3 February, 3 March 1843.

(3) Coventry Herald, 22 February 1856.

(4) See, on this section, Coventry Standard, 28 April, 19 May 1848, 29 August 1851, 11 May 1855. Coventry Herald, 19 May, 7 July 1848, 2 August 1850, Coventry Weekly Times, 20 February 1856. Coventry

In fact, the two organisations were not closely integrated. They, and their committees, continued to hold separate meetings. They remained financially distinct. But at times of crisis the two committees met together to form the 'Amalgamated Committees' that directed the common policy of both associations, and chose from among their number the ten members (six from the Ribbon Weavers' Association, and four from the Factory Operatives' Association) that comprised the 'Executive Committee', meeting daily. This was the body, with Butler as its secretary, that directed the great strike of 1860. There was indeed no conflict of interest or purpose between the two associations in the series of disputes in 1858, 1859 and 1860. But the associations did have defects. The existence of two - at grassroots level - was an unnecessary complication. Some branches of the RWA were too big; Hillfields, for example, had over 3000 members. Some had no complete register of members - which made it difficult to keep a check to see that all declined to work below price. Above all, there was no attempt to build up a strike fund in normal times. The weavers involved in the disputes of 1858 and 1859 were supported by levies on the rest of the trade, but these were not continued after it. The associations entered the strike of 1860 without adequate funds and, since the strike was general, were unable to create one during it. It was proposed to remedy all these deficiencies by the new constitution for a union of all weavers adopted in August 1860, during the strike. By then it was too late.(1)

But great successes had been won by the two bodies. One was the extension of unionism into north Warwickshire, work in which the efforts of northern weavers were spurred on by deputations from Coventry. Here the Plain Ribbon Weavers' Association was first. Branches were formed at Longford and Foleshill in 1854, in Bell Green in 1856, in Attleborough and Bedworth in 1857, in Nuneaton in 1860. The Factory Operatives' Association began branches in Nuneaton, Attleborough and Bedworth in 1858. This spread into the north of the trade union organisation which it had for so long lacked

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(1) Coventry Standard, 28 August 1857, 9 April, 22 October 1858, 17 August 1860. Coventry Herald, 6 March, 20 November 1857, 9 April 1858. Coventry Free Press, 27 April 1860. C.R.O.: Minutes and Accounts of the Ribbon Weavers' Association, 1860, 11 July, 12 July 1860. One result of the closer links between the two associations after 1856 seems to have been that the outdoor jacquard weavers now joined the RWA instead of the FOA. This would explain the dropping after 1856 of the world 'Plain' from the title of the Ribbon Weavers' Association.

was of course intended to make easier the enforcement upon northern manufacturers of payment by the list of prices in both the outdoor and factory trades: an end of moment and value both to the localities concerned and to Coventry, because of the need to eliminate under-price competition from the northern parishes. It seems clear that in fact the lists were gained and consolidated in north Warwickshire in the late 1850s. The interests of all ribbon weavers in Warwickshire were the same - as those of the northern parishes recognised by their enthusiastic support of the city's weavers in their dispute of 1858 and 1859. One year later the ribbon weavers' associations called, and directed through their executive committee, a general strike throughout the county. This, the first such strike, shows the strength and unity of purpose which for all their defects the ribbon weavers' associations possessed.(1)

Even when in the 1840s the different branches of the Coventry trade had separate unions they engaged the services of the same solicitor, William Wilmot. He was the most consistent and vehement supporter of the weavers' cause outside the ranks of the weavers themselves. Most of the weavers' leaders were radicals, some of them active Chartists. Politically, Wilmot was at the opposite pole: a reactionary Tory who defended the weavers' interests because they were part of an ancient order of society where a grateful and peaceful poor were protected by a vigilant paternalism: an order menaced, thought Wilmot, by every contemporary change - by tap water and the water closet (more expensive than the public well and the privy and thus an oppression of the poor) and by the Reform Bill, the repeal of the Corn Laws, and the steam engine, opposed by Wilmot on the grounds (he said) that they harmed the working man.(2) His hero was 'that fine old English gentleman, Colonel Sibthorp'.(3)

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(1) Coventry Weekly Times, 24 December 1856, 28 January, 11 March, 1 July, 8 July, 15 July 1857, 22 September, 24 November 1858, 9 March 1859, 21 March 1860. Coventry Free Press, 27 April 1860. Coventry Standard, 4 August, 25 August 1854, 24 June 1859. Coventry Herald, 26 December 1856, 27 November 1857.

(2) See, for some examples, Coventry Standard, 17 December 1841, 4 February, 22 December 1848, 20 July 1849, 4 May 1855. NB also his views on the Penny Post: 'There never was a greater farce. It did not assist the poor man. The great boon had been to the cotton lords and commercial men. It had saved their pockets.' Coventry Standard, 8 January 1841.

(3) Coventry Standard, 2 February 1855. William Wilmot followed his father as the Marquis of Hertford's agent for his Coventry estates - now the Parkside area; he was also for many years steward of the hundred court of Knightlow, clerk to the county magistrates for the Kirby division, and an officer in the Warwickshire Yeomanry. Coventry Standard, 13 January 1860.

Wilmot was a choleric and single-minded man, who talked at great length about his political ideas; like Sibthorp, he seems to have had little sense of humour or proportion - seeing nothing comic in his bitter complaint to the Local Board of Health that the press of traffic in Hay Lane, the narrow street where he lived, was so great that a horse had thrust its head through his window.(1) Charles Bray described him as 'a piece of rough unadorned human nature, always bursting out in fresh places, and nearly always delightfully in the wrong': a fierce, but innocent and foolish 'paper tiger'. 'Nature intended all that warmth of temperament and force of oratory for a democrat, perhaps a demagogue, but fortune has made him a Tory.'(2) The Coventry Standard spoke of his 'warm and somewhat irritable temper'; but 'under a somewhat excitable surface' was 'a forgiving temper and a warm heart ... great intelligence, sterling honesty, benevolent disposition', and vast sympathy for the 'feeble and suffering artisan'.(3)

Wilmot was a very talented solicitor, who on numerous occasions successfully represented at Coventry magistrates' court weavers in dispute with their masters. In October 1850, for example, he showed his complete mastery of the highly complicated section on permitted hours of working in the recent factory act and his ability to twist the law to the weavers' advantage, by winning for J. and C. Ratliff's factory hands a judgement against their masters for refusing a breakfast half-hour.(4) Disputes over the quality of work by outdoor weavers were common: here again Wilmot appeared, as in 1856, when he defended with great energy and skill (but unsuccessfully) Thomas Lucas, from whom J.N. Clarke claimed in Coventry County Court £2.10s. because of bad workmanship in ribbons Clarke had paid for.(5) By the autumn of 1857 Wilmot had defended before the magistrates 200 weavers from the factory branch of the trade alone, and had gained settlements in their favour in all but

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(1) Coventry Standard, 27 February 1857.
(2) Coventry Herald, 12 November 1852.
(3) Coventry Standard, 13 January 1860.
(4) Coventry Standard, 11 October 1850. Coventry Herald, 4 October 1850. Ratliffs protested that Wilmot had shrewdly misrepresented the law; their contrary interpretation was upheld by the factory inspector, T.J. Howell. Coventry Standard, 18 October 1850, P.P.: [1304] H.C. (1851) xxiii: Reports of Inspectors of Factories for the Half-Year ending 31 October 1850, pp. 26 et seq. NB also Wilmot's successful defence of five factory weavers prosecuted by Ratliffs for breach of contract. Coventry Standard, 26 May 1848.
(5) Coventry Standard, 25 July 1856.

a few cases.(1)

Wilmot was vastly popular with the weavers. In August 1851 the Factory Operatives' Association and their friends - 600 men and women in all - held a tea meeting in St. Mary's Hall to present Wilmot with a silver cup worth £20. He was cheered when he entered: the address expressed the association's vast gratitude to him and denied the calumny, spread about by angry ribbon manufacturers, that he set masters and men against each other; he always recommended 'conciliatory and respectful conduct'. Wilmot was weeping as he rose to speak: 'There have been, and always will be, distinctions in society; we cannot all be masters or all equal, and those who inculcate such doctrines are not true friends to either class'. He thanked the association for trying to solve disputes peacefully, without litigation or strikes, and apologised profusely for the 'angry or hasty manner' which he had shown in the past. The evening concluded with dancing under the association's banner - 'The interests of masters and workpeople are one, where honour presides'.(2)

Three months later the Plain Weavers' Association presented him with a 45 oz silver claret jug bearing the Wilmot arms(3), for his services as solicitor. Wilmot deprecated the gift: he had only done his duty. 'It shows that, though moving in a humble station of life, you have generous feelings, and hearts which can appreciate the least kindness.' The working classes, said Wilmot, were the real producers of wealth, and should be liberally paid and not suffer the competition with each other that was chiefly caused by unprincipled masters without capital who fought the honourable masters with it. These riches did not always bring happiness: which was equally accessible to working men with enough to eat and drink and an acceptance of the inevitable- that society could not essentially be changed and that inequalities would always remain. The only note of discord was struck by Benjamin Poole who while praising Wilmot's 'perfectly disinterested services' to the weavers said he disagreed with him politically; Poole was a Whig.(4)

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(1) Coventry Herald, 20 November 1857.
(2) Coventry Standard, 29 August 1851. NB also Maclean's thanks to Wilmot 'for his invaluable services to them in the various struggle they have had with some parties in the trade', and the letter of 'an outdoor weaver', Coventry Standard, 1 January 1851, 19 May 1854.
(3) Wilmot was a kinsman of the Wilmots of Berkswell.
(4) Coventry Standard, 21 November 1851.

Six years later Wilmot, and Ellice, Joseph Paxton and C.N. Newdegate,(1) were given painted testimonials by the Ribbon Weavers' Association for their help in getting an interview with Sir George Grey over the case of Clarke v. Lucas: as a result Grey had promised to review the laws relating to masters and men. The leading part had been taken by Wilmot, said Daniel Butler; Wilmot had worked without fee though he had visited London on several occasions. 'He had done his duty towards them as their solicitor, as their friend, and as a gentleman.'(2)

Wilmot's popularity among the weavers was partly responsible for his being returned for twenty-one years from 1839 onwards as town councillor for the Gosford Street ward - which included the weaving district of Hillfields. He was 'the Cronstadt of the ward ... it was of no use to attack him'.(3) Wilmot was regarded by the other councillors with a mixture of respect, amusement and anger; he pushed the cause of Tory paternalism at great length and in the most bizarre places.(4) He used the council as a sounding-board to denounce steam factories. For example, he warned in 1855 that the Inspector of Nuisances and the Local Board of Health must not show special treatment for Townsend, whose factory chimneys in West Orchard were emitting dense smoke; alleging that only Townsend's membership of the board had led it to pass the plans of his new factory - an unsuitable place for human beings to work in; and arguing that the bad health of Coventrians was caused by factories and that the suggested appointment of a Medical Officer of Health was thus an unnecessary extravagance. A healthy city could be secured by simply refusing building permission for factories. In these views he stood alone on the council, but his election as mayor in 1858 (after years of being excluded from

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(1) At this time Ellice and Paxton were members of Parliament for Coventry and C.N. Newdegate for North Warwickshire.

(2) Coventry Herald, 25 September 1857.

(3) Coventry Standard, 3 November 1854.

(4) See, for one example among many, the account in the Coventry Standard, 3 November 1848, of Wilmot's lengthy speech at a meeting of the Local Board of Health, arguing that four acres of the cemetery should be set aside to provide cheap rate-subsidised family graves for the poor: the social segregation thus entailed would be a mere recognition of the necessary and perpetual inequalities in society. His proposal was negatived by a junction of radicals who objected to his condescension, and others who disliked such uneconomic expenditure.

council committees because of his verbosity) was greeted by an unprecedented burst of cheering from the spectators in St. Mary's Hall.(1) By this time, however, the technological change which Wilmot so much opposed was compelling the weavers into a militancy with which he could not sympathise; during the strike of 1858 he dropped his previous wholehearted support of the weavers, thought that there were faults on both sides, and concluded that there was a real danger of the trade being forced to leave the city.(2) The era in which his social philosophy was appropriate and fruitful was coming to an end. His death in January 1860 - just before the final collapse of the system of paternalism and deference he had supported so long - was followed by unique signs of regard and affection. Crowds followed his funeral cortege to Allesley church. Unprecedentedly, a funeral peal of 2574 changes, lasting for 1 hour 45 minutes, was rung at St. Michael's. Only that very different man, the Victorian liberal Edward Ellice, was accorded similar marks of respect on his death a few years later: a conjunction which points to the profoundly ambivalent attitudes of Coventry's artisans. But only Wilmot, on his death, was given unstinted praise by all four of the city's newspapers.(3)

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(1) Coventry Standard, 12 January, 26 January 1855, 13 March, 23 October 1857, 12 November 1858.

(2) Coventry Standard, 15 October 1858.

(3) Coventry Standard, 13 January 1860, the Tory journal in which Wilmot was chief shareholder, not unnaturally praised his Tory paternalism. But NB also the obituaries in the liberal Coventry Herald, 13 January 1860; the radical Coventry Weekly Times, 11 January 1860: 'many, as well as ourselves, who differed from his politically, will regret his loss, as he was the warm friend of the working man, to whom he was always accessible, and in his death the weavers of Coventry have lost a most valuable advocate and adviser'; and the radical Coventry Free Press, 13 January 1860: 'He is gone from us, and may those who have been the recipients of his generosity and kindness, remember, with affectionate regard, their friend and benefactor'.

II

The Lists of Prices, 1832-1850

The weavers had a difficult task in seeking to improve and maintain lists of prices for their work. Their collective determination was of course undermined by the willingness of individual weavers to accept less than the list in times of slump. Likewise, the masters were naturally more reluctant, or less able, to pay by the list at such times. Their attitude to the list was also affected by the pressures that the weavers and the community at large could bring to bear on them, by their willingness to be swayed by these, and by the condition of their stockrooms; manufacturers with large stocks of ribbon in hand would find their value depreciated by an abandonment of the list of prices. The variables that affected the fortunes of the list were thus infinitely subtle.(1)

The forces working for the maintenance of the list of prices were always weakest in the single-hand trade of the parishes to the north of Coventry. Immediately after the Beck mill-burning of November 1831 the manufacturers were most determined to maintain the lists everywhere, and for some months their committee worked energetically with a weavers' committee from the north of the county to exercise 'the strictest vigilance in detecting any and every attempt to infringe on the spirit of the list'.(2) Thus the single-hand list of November 1831 lasted for over two years - a longer time than its predecessors: but it then collapsed (having been subject to continued attack from the first) because the gross surplus of labour was not counterbalanced by any strong weavers' organisation or corporate feeling to support the list. After 1833 there

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(1) Coventry Herald, 29 January 1836. P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 233.

(2) P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 223.

there seems to have been no single-hand list.(1) The result was the great poverty in the northern parishes which is reported throughout the period, and broken only by boom conditions which temporarily raised the prices paid to single-hand weavers. The jacquard masters who had established themselves at Bedworth to take advantage in their loom-shops of the cheap labour of the north - single-hand weavers being only too willing to work for them - continued after the collapse of the single-hand trade to pay by a common list. But this was to benefit themselves by an agreement not to undercut each other and varied with the prices paid in Coventry - being set, however, always below them. 'The feeling between the masters and the men is, at Bedworth, far less amicable even than Coventry.'(2) And at Nuneaton there was, after the collapse of 1833, no engine or jacquard list at all for many years.(3)

The Coventry trade was in general more fortunate, partly because the city's weavers were more tightly organised than those in the country districts and were able to bring greater pressures to bear on both recalcitrant men and masters, and partly because for over twenty years after 1831 there was sympathetic response to these pressures - considerable support in the city at large for the system of regulating wages by the list of prices. The various groups of weavers in the city fared differently in their attempts after 1831 to maintain their lists. The list was for many years most consistently kept in respect of the plain engine-loom trade which comprised the largest single group of the city's weavers. They competed among each other for work and faced the increasing competition of power looms in the North of England in black ribbons, and the competition of the single-hand weavers nearer home. But these competed less with the city than the city competed with them: because of the vast inferiority of the single-hand looms, usually incapable of producing ribbons more cheaply though the single-hand

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(1) P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 221 et seq; H.C. 341 (1835) xiii, pp. 232, 249 et seq. Coventry Herald, 13 January 1832, 25 October, 15 November, 22 November 1833, 23 May, 12 December 1834, 13 February 1835.

(2) P.P. [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 235, 280 et seq.

(3) ibid., p. 282.

weavers earned much less.(1) And from the 1830s onwards there was an expanding lower-class and middle-class market for plain ribbons, usually secure behind the tariff from French competition - though only after the list reductions of September 1829.(2)

Even so attempts were being made soon after November 1831 to break their list. The vigilance of weavers and of manufacturers, anxious to 'prevent the recurrence of the inconveniences and evils that attended the manufacture in 1831',(3) held it firm throughout 1832 and 1833. But in the following year the attentions of the masters' committee of twenty relaxed and it ceased to meet. In April several manufacturers refused to pay by the list though the great majority thought it unnecessary to abandon it. David Buckney, enraged by the failure of the Whig government to aid the working class and by its attitude to the Dorset labourers, argued at a weavers' meeting in April that the weavers should strive for political power to cure their poverty. His radical colleagues in the weavers' leadership did not support him, and instead the meeting resolved to send Edward and Thomas Goode, David Smith, George Baddeley and James Perkins to see the reducers. This they did - without success - and the weavers' committee circulated an address to the inhabitants, asking for their support; James Beck, the banker, Walter Hook, the vicar of Holy Trinity, and the mayor regretted the reductions and offered to mediate. Their attempt was unsuccessful. The weavers suffered, said David Buckney, from 'the avarice, cupidity and cruelty of some of the manufacturers ... some half-dozen of senseless, greedy wretches, who wish to introduce the slaughterhouse system - beings who prefer wealth to the demoralisation and the daily increasing misery of our population'.(4) The

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(1) Coventry Herald, 30 September 1833, 18 July 1834. P.P.: H.C. 341 (1835) xiii, pp. 232, 249. The great decline in the number of single-hand looms in the city between 1818 and 1838 is shown in Tables III and IV and explains the decreasing competitiveness of north Warwickshire with Coventry in the plain trade in the period. In the jacquard trade such competition increased. NB the comment of the Coventry Herald, 18 July 1834: 'The infatuation with which weavers cling to inferior looms, when better may be readily had, would excite astonishment, but for its being of such ordinary occurrence; and the people of Foleshill furnish a specimen of this lamentable want of enterprise. It has, however, been well for Coventry, that the single-hand weavers have not attempted to relieve themselves by the use of engine-looms; for, if they had, what one party had gained, the other would probably have lost.'

(2) For a discussion of this topic, see Chapter Five, Section III.

(3) Coventry Herald, 15 November 1833.

(4) Coventry Herald, 1 August 1834.

action of the reducers threatened to compel the honourable masters to abandon the list, from necessity, and by August these were declining to give out work in the plain trade because they feared a general drop in prices. The weavers, meeting at the Hill and Hollow Close, decided on a strike in the plain trade and on the publication of the names of all weavers who refused to seal their looms. A weaver who had taken work below price was bombarded with turf as he passed the meeting.(1)

David Buckney repeated in August his argument that the remedy for their suffering was for the working class to gain political power. Again, he was not supported at the weavers' meetings by his radical colleagues, who opposed his proposal that if the list was reduced the weavers should refuse to pay all local rates and combine for a twenty-five per cent reduction in rents and a wholesale lowering of prices. Buckney withdrew his motion. Instead, at Edward Goode's suggestion the weavers, with the help of a requisition from forty-two inhabitants, persuaded the mayor to convene a public meeting on the question in the County Hall. Here Mark Pearman, Walter Hook and T.B. Troughton (a liberal solicitor and the town clerk of the reformed corporation after 1836) praised the patience of the weavers and deplored the reductions. C. Ratliff and Thomas Cope, two large manufacturers, agreed with them. Cope believed that the plain list was now low enough to enable the trade to compete with France. But he thought it necessary to reduce the list price of plain black ribbons because of the competition in this branch of the power looms in the North. The weavers' committee readily agreed to a reduction for blacks, and a new list modifying that of November 1831 where these were concerned was published at the end of August; in coloured ribbons, the lists were identical. A deputation of gentlemen and clergy waited on the five masters who had abandoned the list and persuaded them to pay by it. The strike then stopped.(2)

A few months later a few manufacturers were reducing the prices paid for plain ribbons. A deputation from a weavers' meeting remonstrated with the reducers, unsuccessfully. A general strike in the plain trade followed. During it the weavers paraded the town

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(1) ibid., 28 June, 2 August, 15 November, 20 December 1833, 11 April, 18 April, 25 April, 2 May, 18 July, 22 August, 29 August 1834. P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 226.

(2) Coventry Herald, 29 August, 5 September 1834. P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 236.

to gain sympathy, and carrying banners inscribed 'Willing to labour but doomed to starve', 'The contemplated reduction will render labour valueless', and 'The list, the whole list, and nothing but the list'. There was some public support for the weavers: Sibley Whittem induced the Reform Procession Committee to give the balance of its fund - £34 which remained in the bank since 1832 - to the fund for the relief of striking weavers. Cash was collected from inhabitants and the two M.P.s too: £130 was distributed to 1,100 journeyhands at 2s. each, and to 1,600 children at 2d. a head. The mayor was requisitioned for a public meeting, at which the usual assembly of gentlemen appointed a committee to reconcile masters and men.

But even the honourable masters thought some reduction in the list was necessary because of the labour surplus in the trade, though Hennell, on their behalf, argued that there should be a proper list, not a general abandonment which would lead to a 'destructive torrent'. The masters would not meet a deputation from the weavers' committee: there followed an angry meeting of weavers at which the committee, afraid for the effects on public opinion of a parade of outraged weavers, with difficulty squashed the proposal for a rally of the town. A procession of weavers and their families did the following day visit Merridew's loom-shop, breaking the windows and forcing his weavers to leave their looms. Three weavers were arrested. The mayor, George Eld, issued a handbill denouncing violence, asked Lieutenant-Colonel Ewart to hold his men in the barracks in readiness, and swore in seventy special constables. But 'The city was perfectly tranquil during the night'.(1) There was no more violence. The weavers returned to work, accepting a new list of prices, which gave about seven and a half per cent less than the list of November 1831. The three weavers who had been arrested at Merridew's were fined 1s. at Coventry assizes.(2)

In September when trade was good the plain engine weavers won an advance in the list. The new list was almost identical with

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(1) P.R.O.: H.O. 52/27, George Eld to Goulburn, 13 February 1835. Six weeks before Eld had thought it necessary to swear in 500 specials - and 200 pensioners - to keep the peace at the Coventry election. P.R.O.: H.O. 52/27, George Eld to Goulburn, 2 January 1835.

(2) P.R.O.: H.O. 52/27, George Eld to Goulburn, 13 February 1835. Coventry Herald, 12 December 1834, 30 January, 6 February, 13 February, 20 February, 27 March 1835. P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 230, 236; H.C. 341 (1835) xiii, p. 233.

that of November 1831(1) and remained the list price for the engine trade - though sometimes challenged - till the crisis of 1860. In 1836 a few manufacturers proposed reductions: they were persuaded not to by negotiation. Again in 1837 two or three attempted reductions. 'There is nothing in steam, foreign importation, or Northern competition, which justifies this robbery', said the weavers' handbill. George Baddeley asked at a weavers' meeting for the support of the honourable manufacturers, who would be forced to abandon the list if the reductions proceeded. Edward Goode asked for forgiveness for those weavers who took out work under price - and threatened publication of their names if they did not desist. This was, he said, a question that should unite weavers of all political persuasions. All manufacturers save two signed the list again. To rally support the weavers paraded through the city with a drum and fife and a placard inscribed 'stick to the list, for your lives'. A decision to strike the plain trade was taken: the two manufacturers gave way and signed the list.(2)

In the plain engine trade the list thus endured until the summer of 1840. Then once again a few manufacturers departed from the list - not with respect to all their hands, but only to those who were not firm enough to resist. The manufacturers who were unwilling to reduce nevertheless declined giving out more work in the plain trade because they were being undersold: but they could do nothing themselves to persuade the reducers to stick by the list. At the weavers' meetings Edward Goode and Buckney attacked the iniquity of the reducers and articulated again what was the common argument of the plain weavers - that since ribbons were a fashionable article reductions in price did not increase demand for them. 'Let them reduce so low as they might, there would be no greater demand.'(3) An appeal to the interests of the inhabitants at large was suggested: a reduction of the list of prices would lead to non-payment of rates and loss of business for city shops. At Greyfriars Green a resolution to press for a town

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(1) Coventry Herald, 25 September 1835. [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 236.

(2) Coventry Herald, 18 November, 25 November 1836, 21 July, 11 August, 18 August 1837.

(3) Coventry Standard, 5 June, 31 July, 7 August 1840. Coventry Herald, 31 July, 7 August 1840.

meeting was carried unanimously, Edward Goode arguing that he had never known one to fail.

But this one did. Of the many inhabitants who did sign the requisition, few turned up. The meeting agreed in a unanimous resolution with Buckney's opinion that labour ought not to be treated as a 'marketable commodity' since when there was a surplus, as then, misery resulted. A deputation of gentlemen waited on the three reducing manufacturers - but they would not agree to pay by the list. A general abandonment of the list and a reduction in piece-work rates of about twenty per cent then followed. David Smith commented later: 'It would now be a neck and neck race to ruin'.(1)

Abijah Hill Pears, a large paternalist manufacturer with great sympathy for the list, was typical of many: he resisted reductions as long as he could, but was eventually forced to abandon the list. All that he and other large manufacturers with similar views - like Cleophas Ratliff and Thomas Cope - could do, was to contribute generously to the relief of distressed weavers. It was useless for Edward Goode to say once again that reductions did not help to increase the consumption of ribbons. Buckney blamed the small under-capitalised masters, with few stocks in hand to be depreciated by a drop in price, for initiating the abandonment of the list. But in fact even further reductions - lowering the earnings of a journeyman's journeyman to 6s. per week after loom-hire had been paid - were soon undertaken by one of the largest manufacturers, Henry Merridew, with 170 men weaving for him.(2)

The slump in the trade, and the distress that resulted, lasted throughout 1841 and into 1842. Even further reductions of price were proposed: the national slump of 1842 lowered the consumption of ribbons, and the surplus of labour in the plain trade led to internecine conflict between weaver and weaver.(3) In May 1842, resolved a meeting of plain weavers, conditions in Coventry were 'bad, beyond all precedent'; any further reductions 'must deprive

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(1) Coventry Standard, 7 August, 14 August 1840. Coventry Herald, 7 August, 14 August, 21 August 1840.

(2) Coventry Standard, 29 January, 5 February, 19 March 1841. Coventry Herald, 20 January 1841.

(3) Coventry Standard, 12 February, 26 November, 17 December, 24 December, 31 December 1841, 7 January, 21 January, 25 February 1842. Coventry Herald, 19 November 1841, 1 July 1842.

them of the common necessaries of life, and render death itself desirable'.(1) Many weavers' meetings were held: at which it was decided to fight for the reimposition of the list of prices of 1835. Thomas Maclean, a leader of the plain weavers, urged them not to accept less than the list:

> If they possessed one spark of feeling for their families, they would resist any reduction; they might as well die in the fields in the summer as drag out a miserable existence till the winter, and die by starvation in their comfortless homes.(2)

At meeting after meeting the members of the weavers' committee emphasised that the honourable manufacturers - Thomas Cope was instanced - would be prepared to pay by the list and had only reduced because of (as Cope had put it) 'the unnatural competition practised throughout the trade';(3) that a general paying by the list would raise purchasing power and be of value to the city at large; and that if the support of the honourable manufacturers and the city as a whole were to be gained only peaceful methods must be used - so that a parade of some weavers through the streets with a donkey was deprecated.

The hands of each manufacturer waited on him and asked for his agreement to the reimposition of the list. Cope wished to pay more than the list in the plain trade; others were willing to sign the list if all did: Merridew was equivocal - blaming steam power in Derby for his inability to pay by the list. At length only four manufacturers - all large ones - positively declined to pay by the list. A general strike in the plain trade followed - in the same week as the Coventry Labour Protection Society was formed. Cope lent a weaver 15s. to tide him over the strike and apparently was one of the honourable manufacturers for whose help in forming the union the weavers afterwards expressed their gratitude.(4) The magistrates intervened in the dispute, in effect on the side of the weavers: the chief constable went round the city with the weavers' committee to urge the recalcitrant masters to agree to pay by the list. This action, and pressure from

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(1) Coventry Standard, 6 May 1842.

(2) ibid., 13 May 1842.

(3) loc. cit.

(4) ibid., 18 November 1842. Coventry Herald, 18 November 1842.

inhabitants and shopkeepers generally, helped to give the weavers victory; by the third week in May all manufacturers signed the list of 1835 once more.(1) 'They had', said Maclean, 'just escaped dropping into the vortex of reduction, from which nothing would have relieved them'. If in future any weaver proposed to accept work below the list, Maclean advised weavers to 'go to that man, not in a spirit of anger but of love as a brother ... they should expostulate with him ... that by his reducing the price of labour, he would be starving the already famishing children'. The last meeting concluded with thanks to the weavers for their unity and peaceful behaviour, and to the magistrates for their confidence in them, 'which prevented any premature interference in meetings'.(2) At the end of the year the committee of the Plain Ribbon Weavers' Association reported that despite the continuing depression the list had been adhered to; manufacturers and weavers who had infringed the list had been visited and had pledged themselves not to do so again.(3)

In the next few years a few 'sordid manufacturers' attempted to pay below the list in the plain trade, or to evade it by charging high loom-rents. But the intervention of members of the committee dealt with these problems. Small advances in the list in certain ribbons were gained, and in return the Plain Ribbon Weavers' Association declared its willingness to reduce the prices of others if the masters could show cause. The honourable masters were often thanked for their help to the association, the weavers who brought all into disrepute by embezzling silk reprobated, and peaceful methods urged for maintenance of the list. 'The rights of property are held sacred by us, and the rights of the artisan to such a remuneration in return for his exertions as will procure him all the comforts of life are held equally sacred', declared the association.(4)

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(1) Coventry Standard, 18 November 1842. P.P.: H.C. 307 (1860) xxii, p. 92.

(2) Coventry Standard, 20 May 1842. See also ibid., 6 May, 13 May, and Coventry Herald, 6 May, 13 May, 20 May 1842, for detailed accounts of the proceedings.

(3) Coventry Standard, Coventry Herald, 18 November 1842.

(4) Coventry Standard, 26 May, 8 December 1843, 15 November 1844, 12 December 1845. Coventry Herald, 29 September, 8 December 1843, 12 December 1845.

The fate of the jacquard list from 1831 to 1843 was different. There had been a vast increase in the number of jacquard looms in Warwickshire after 1824, for the production of fancy ribbons. But superior French design had meant that in the late 1820s the Warwickshire trade was quickly beaten out of the most expensive upper-class market for fancy ribbons. This market was never recovered, and Warwickshire had to rest content with a cheaper fancy trade, where fashion was of less significance and price of more, and where designs inferior to those of Lyons and St. Etienne were protected by the tariff. This market was to some extent created by middle-class imitation of the ultra-fashionable French trade above it, and grew in the 1830s. Nevertheless, it was not sufficient to employ all the jacquard looms in the area, and the fancy list of November 1831 was soon under attack. The organisation of the city's jacquard weavers, and the efforts of the masters to maintain the list, were undermined by the jacquard masters of Bedworth and Nuneaton, who employed in their loom-shops weavers promoted from the single-hand trade and thus glad to accept less than the list since they were still receiving more than they were before. In January 1833 the weavers of the two or three jacquard masters in the city who proposed to abandon the list went on strike: but though they were supported for some weeks by those still at work and by collections from leading citizens - Ellice giving £10 - they did not succeed and the whole trade was borne down. By October 1833 the jacquard list was abandoned and thereafter the price paid for fancy work varied according to the demands of the market and the skill of the weaver - the skill of the best jacquard weavers being very great and far more than that of the average plain engine man.(1)

Inspired by the success of the plain engine weavers in 1842, the figure weavers of the city formed their own trade union at the end of the year and began to press for the reimposition of the list. The following March a meeting of jacquard weavers chaired by W. Housiaux complained of the different prices paid by local masters for jacquard weaving and stressed the advantage of a standard list, to masters as well as men. The jacquard masters were approached by members of the committee; only a minority would sign the list

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(1) Coventry Herald, 25 January, 1 February, 8 February, 20 September, 18 October 1833. P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 9, 14 et seq, 48 et seq, 225 et seq, 277 et seq; H.C. 341 (1835) xiii, pp. 268, 277.

unconditionally, though more were prepared to sign if the others did, and some paid already by the list the weavers proposed. The competition of the country weavers was mentioned as the cause of an inability to pay by the list: one master could buy for 1s.3d. a completed length of ribbon which by the proposed list of prices would cost 1s.9d. for labour alone. Negotiations proceeded for several weeks. At length there was a strike against manufacturers who would not sign the list. The mayor - Abijah Hill Pears, himself a ribbon manufacturer - was approached by the weavers; he was sympathetic and agreed to call a meeting of manufacturers. This was indecisive, and when the jacquard weavers' committee met the masters again the majority refused to bind themselves to the list; competition in the fancy trade was so great that they had to be free to pay what the current market would yield. Thomas Cope, though he paid by the list at that time, was one who refused to sign it. The strike failed; at length the weavers returned to work to make the best bargain they could with their employers. During the strike the mayor's injunction to be peaceful was kept: a donkey was paraded (and was captured by Inspector Prosser and six constables in Gosford Street) and several hundred weavers yelled 'Come out, come out' at the weavers inside a loom-shop in Arnold Place. Three were arrested for riot and conspiracy: at the quarter sessions the prosecution dropped the case.(1)

The accounts of this dispute make it plain that jacquard weavers in both the outdoor and factory branches were involved. Their interests converged, not only in their common desire for a list of prices, but also in the dislike felt by both the factory hands themselves and by the handloom weavers outdoors for loom-shops and factories: 'to which they have a great reluctance; because they believe that they are places where all finer feelings must give way, all personal qualities, all tastes, all tempers, and all susceptibilities must be dragooned into compliance with one set of restrictive regulations'. And to these feelings were added - where the outdoor weavers were concerned - fear of the superior competitive power of the steam loom, which threatened to subdue the outdoor trade.(2)

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(1) Coventry Standard, 18 November 1842, 10 March, 17 March, 24 March, 31 March, 7 April 1843. Coventry Herald, 3 March, 10 March, 7 April 1843.

(2) Coventry Standard, 10 March 1843. See also J. Gutteridge, op. cit., p. 149.

Quite apart from this hostility, the outdoor weavers had traditionally been opposed to the mode of payment adopted by John Day in his loom-shop (where the looms were not of course powered by steam) in the 1820s - payment by the week instead of by the piece.(1) After signing the manufacturers' declaration of 10 November 1831, and thus agreeing in effect to pay by the piece-work list and not by the week, John Day resumed the payment of weekly wages some years later. In February 1834, when the Coventry branch of the Grand National Consolidated Trades' Union was active, his loom-shop weavers declared that they were willing 'no longer to continue upon a system which is in direct opposition to the legal and customary usages of the trade' and when he refused to agree to abandon the payment of weekly wages, struck.(2) They were supported by the union, which issued a call to all weavers not to blackleg:

> Weavers! Is there among you who will tender your services to occupy the looms of these our noble Brothers? Will you, by such nefarious and disgraceful conduct, lend yourselves to perpetuate a system which has long received the unqualified condemnation of honourable Operatives and Manufacturers in the Trade? A sense of your own welfare will no doubt be sufficient to guard you from committing so gross an outrage upon our common interests.(3)

It was not sufficient. Some weavers continued to work in Day's Far Gosford Street loom-shop; a crowd picketed it and sludge was thrown at Elizabeth Liggins when she left in the evening; there were cries of 'Bah! Bah!' (because Elizabeth Liggins was a black sheep) and her father was knocked down when he came to fetch her. John Day went to the mayor's parlour to take out a summons against those responsible and found the building surrounded by a crowd of several hundred when he emerged. Eighteen constables escorted him home. Two weavers found guilty of assaulting Elizabeth Liggins and her father were sentenced to three months' imprisonment at quarter sessions.(4) Day persisted in his plan of weekly wages 'through the extremest obloquy'(5): Joseph Gutteridge only took a job at his loom-shop at £1 a week because he could not afford to

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(1) See Chapter II for this dispute.

(2) Coventry Herald, 21 February 1834.

(3) P.R.O.: H.O. 52/25, Ribbon Trade, Weavers! Weavers! Arise! Arise! 17 February 1834.

(4) P.R.O.: H.O. 52/25, W. Hawkes to Melbourne, 20 February 1834. Coventry Herald, 28 February, 11 April 1834.

(5) P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 50.

achieve his ambition of becoming a first-hand journeyman and 'was forced through circumstances to take whatsoever presented itself'.(1)

But Day went bankrupt a few months later - about, it seems, 1837 or 1838 - because of his unwise attempt to power jacquard looms by steam, at that time unsuited to the figured-weaving trade. When Fletcher reported in 1838, payment by the week had apparently ceased, though the steam factory system was growing.(2) In 1840 the Coventry Herald printed a long article on J. and C. Ratliff's steam factory in Hill Street - apparently it had been the scene of Day's unfortunate venture - and made it clear that the weavers were paid by the piece, not by the week.(3) The accounts of the 1843 dispute in the figured trade show that piece-work was the mode of payment in factories: the common concern of jacquard weavers, both in factories and outdoors, was that these payments were usually not in accordance with the list. Weekly wages do not seem to have been paid, except very rarely.(4)

But by 1848 they were common in the city's ribbon factories, though their acceptance in the preceding years by the weavers is totally unrecorded in the sources. This acquiescence, a few years after the bitter enmity to Day's paying by the week, was most probably partly the result of the increasing employment of jacquard looms in steam factories in the 1840s. In the 1820s and early 1830s John Day had woven only plain ribbons in his loom-shop: any pauses in their work which his weavers would have been able to take (had they been paid by the piece, not by the week) would have been the result of their deliberate preference of idleness to pay: the weaving of plain ribbons was comparatively simple and enabled earnings to be exactly predicted. But jacquard weaving necessarily entailed frequent and unwanted stoppages to alter patterns, over which weavers had no control. Piece-work in the figured factory trade disabled weavers from forecasting their earnings exactly: weekly work was more secure. But this consideration leaves unexplained the prevalence of weekly wages in the plain factories

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(1) J. Gutteridge, op. cit., p. 64.

(2) loc. cit., P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, pp. 50 et seq.

(3) Coventry Herald, 30 October 1840.

(4) Sansom brothers advertised for weavers at weekly wages during the 1843 dispute, but a few weeks later were said to be paying by the list, at piece-work. Coventry Standard, 17 March, 31 March 1843.

by 1848, and a major cause of the acceptance of weekly wages by both plain and jacquard factory hands in the 1840s was that with the introduction of disciplined rhythms of work into both piece-paying and weekly paying steam factories in the 1840s (through the separate picking-up system and other means) the greater freedom previously a corollary of the piece-work system was eroded.(1)

The growing competitiveness of the steam factory increased the hostility towards it of the outdoor weavers, as was shown in the dispute of 1848. This began in the factories themselves - both the plain and the jacquard factories. The implementation of the Ten Hours' Bill meant a reduction in the working week from sixty-three hours to fifty-eight. Several factory masters, of whom Cope and Hammerton were the most important, undertook to pay the old rates of weekly wages: others proposed reductions. The factory operatives met, resolved to form their own union, and were urged by Henry Franklin, the chairman of their meeting, to use only 'peaceful and moral' means against recalcitrant masters: not to strike but to give in their notice and rely upon getting work in the outdoor weaving, possible since the spring trade was booming. A letter from the Plain Weavers' Association (representing the interests of the outdoor engine-loom weavers) showed their support of the factory hands and their desire to maintain in factories costs and wages high enough to preserve the security of the outdoor branch. Its reception by the factory hands themselves shows their dislike of the institutions they worked in: its proposal that parliament should be asked to place a tax on steam was greeted with loud cheers.(2) The hands of the masters who proposed to reduce wages gave in their notice and in the following week were supported by contributions from the outdoor weavers, the dyers, the Spon Street watchmakers, and many tradespeople. One leading draper gave £1 to the fund. Henry Franklin warned his men to behave peaceably: they were not even to groan outside the factory masters' houses. Throughout the week they paraded the town with flags bearing the legend 'We work to live, but not to starve' and 'God bless Lord Ashley'. By the end of the week some of the factory masters agreed to pay the old rates of weekly wages. Their hands

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(1) The issues involved are touched on by the Coventry Standard and Coventry Herald, 26 September 1856, with reference to a current dispute at Cash's factory.

(2) Coventry Herald and Coventry Standard, 28 April 1848.

returned to work.(1)

Then Messrs. J. and C. Ratliff proposed to their factory weavers, both the plain and the jacquard hands, what back in the 1820s and 30s Day's hands had wanted - payment by the piece. But he offered now piece-rate terms which would have enabled him effectively to beat the competition of the power-loom plain ribbon weavers of Derby - and which would have made the more powerful his competition with the outdoor weavers of Coventry. The strike against the Ratliffs continued while they took on blackleg labour. His regular hands were determined to press for the Coventry outdoor plain list, allowing the Ratliffs one-third for the cost of power and looms - costs which were of course borne by the first-hand journeymen in the outdoor trade: under this list the Ratliffs' weavers' earnings would have risen to 16s. or 17s. a week. Such a list would have been equal to the Derby list. Delegates from Derby urged the Ratliffs' men to fight and promised money in support from Derby, Congleton and Leek. The Coventry Plain Weavers' Association held meetings in support of the Ratliffs' hands, and resolved unanimously not to take outdoor work from the Ratliffs until the strike was settled, and to support the factory strikers should they be out six months or more. At meetings on Greyfriars Green at which all types of weavers were present, demonstrating the common interests of the trade, Henry Franklin and others talked of plans to gain at last a regular list for figured ribbons and to enforce the outdoor lists in all factories after the Ratliffs were beaten: piece-work at regular prices would benefit financially both outdoor weavers and factory hands - and would also free the latter from the discipline of the overseer, or his immoral attentions. 'Every husband, and every father, and all men of right feeling, must be most anxious for the protection and security of the females employed in factories against all kinds of oppression.'(2) Thomas Maclean addressed a weavers' meeting.

> If any of Mr. Ratliff's lick-spittles were there, he wished them to listen to what he had further to say that evening ... He drew a frightful picture of the working of the factory system, which he compared to Russian serfdom; and said that low wages tended to demoralise, and were alike destructive to the shop-keeper and the artisan. They had been told that competition was the cause of low wages. They had met there that evening to destroy that competition. He wished people to be rewarded for their labour, that their wives and daughters might not be obliged to go into factories.'(3)

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(1) Coventry Herald and Coventry Standard, 5 May 1848.
(2) Coventry Herald, 2 June 1848.
(3) Coventry Standard, 12 May 1848.

And, said Thomas Brocklebank, an outdoor weaver, some days later; 'It was necessary that the price should be maintained, as there was nearly £30,000 of machinery engaged in the hand-loom weaving, which, if not protected by a list in the steam factories, would in the course of ten or fifteen years become greatly depreciated in value'.(1)

The strike lasted for more than a month, and towards the end of May became extended into a general strike of all factory hands as a means of bringing additional pressure to bear on the Ratliffs at a time when there was a strong demand for ribbons and manufacturers were reluctant to lose production. Tempers rose. Strike pickets surrounded the factories at 5 a.m. and the blacklegs who entered the Ratliffs' factory in Hill Street were beaten up; policemen were placed at the gates thereafter. At the next weavers' meeting nearly 2,000 hand-loom and factory weavers were warned against further acts of violence by Henry Franklin and Thomas Brocklebank. A few days later the message was reaffirmed by Solomon Eagleton to 5,000 hand-loom and factory weavers meeting on Greyfriars Green. There were no further acts of violence - merely continued processions through the town. The strikers were supported by levies of 6d. per loom from the power loom weavers of Derby and from the hand-loom weavers of Coventry, collected at district meetings of the Plain Weavers' Association. These sums were sufficient to pay two-thirds of their normal earnings in the first weeks of the strike and full pay for the last.

After the intervention of an arbitration committee (William Taunton, William Browett and Edward Goode were its most prominent members) set up by a public meeting in St. Mary's Hall, the strike ended in partial victory for the strikers over the Ratliffs. They agreed to pay the weavers' list for plain ribbons but refused the jacquard list; for figured ribbons his weavers accepted lower prices than they had wanted. A general jacquard list was as far off as ever and there was no attempt to force the other manufacturers to give up the payment of weekly wages. The incomplete success of the strike was attributed by William Housiaux, a leader of the factory weavers, to the inefficiency of their trade union; its inability to prevent blacklegging was implied. Certainly, the factory weavers lacked the solid organisation and zeal of the outdoor

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(1) loc. cit. See also on this point Edward Goode's letter, Coventry Standard, 16 June 1848.

plain weavers, who made clear - for example, in long letters to the Coventry Herald - their determined enthusiasm for the strike, which they saw as a means of defending their own labour and security.(1)

(1) For a full account of this dispute, see Coventry Standard, 28 April, 5 May, 12 May, 26 May, 2 June, 9 June, 16 June 1848, Coventry Herald, 28 April, 5 May, 12 May, 19 May, 26 May, 2June, 9 June, 16 June, 17 July 1848.

III

The Lists of Prices, 1850-1858

The growing prosperity of the ribbon trade in the early 1850s meant fewer disputes in either the outdoor or the factory trades, though there were still dishonourable masters willing to pay below the list of prices and weavers compelled on occasion to work below it.(1) In 1853 the factory weavers won an advance of 1s. in their weekly wages by a series of brief strikes.(2) Trouble returned in the following year. One of the leading factory firms, Spencer and Horsfall, reduced wages by 1s. because of a slump in the winter and a surplus of weavers; they offered to pay an extra shilling to 'good hands' but all forty-four of their men struck to obtain the old rates for all. Spencer and Horsfall took on blacklegs; the strikers beat them up; for this one striker was arrested and fined £5. Despite their efforts the strikers were not successful.(3) A few months later many manufacturers abandoned the plain list in the outdoor trade. They included Sharp and Odell, who 'always had an honourable name in the trade'. The weavers met in St. Mary's Hall at the end of May with Edward Goode in the chair. Daniel Butler, the secretary to the Plain Weavers' Association, argued that if possible a strike should be

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(1) Coventry Standard, 18 July 1851. Coventry Herald, 25 July 1851. The only major dispute between 1848 and 1853 was with J. and C. Ratliff, over their failure to give a breakfast break, in apparent contravention of the factory acts. There was a strike, but no violence. The factory inspector ruled that the Ratliffs were correct in their interpretation of the law. Coventry Standard, 11 October, 18 October, 25 October, 8 November 1850. Coventry Herald, 4 October, 25 October 1850. P.P.: [1304] H.C. (1851) xxiii; Reports of Inspectors of Factories for the half-year ending 31 October 1850, pp. 26 et seq.

(2) Coventry Standard, 26 August 1853.

(3) ibid., 3 February, 10 February, 17 February 1854. Coventry Herald, 10 February 1854.

avoided, but the widespread departures from the plain list had to be fought and another attempt made to gain a list for figured ribbons. When approached, Spencer and Horsfall had declared their unwillingness to sign the list: 'They did not care what the town, nor what twenty towns might think, for they should pursue their own course with their own business regardless of anybody'.(1) They had 'advanced the argument about political economy, and told them [the committee] it was unreasonable to expect as good prices to be paid in a bad time of trade as in a prosperous one. They admitted, however, that a reduction of wages would not cause any more goods to be made.'(2) The dishonest masters were also, reported Butler, resorting to unfair tricks at a time when work was short and weavers were anxious to get it at any price. Masters were giving out silk to be wound wet, and then paying for dry - 'wiggling at the scale into the bargain'. Factory masters were practising 'the nibbling system' - altering the clock at meal times. Unless checked, these practises would spread to the honourable masters. Butler and Goode stressed the old argument - that lower earnings for weavers would mean lower profits for the city's shopkeepers, who were widely sympathetic to the weavers' cause.(3)

One week later the committee of the Plain Weavers' Association reported that almost all the masters had been persuaded to pay by the list of prices if the others did: even Spencer and Horsfall, 'whose alarming reductions have created such a sensation in Coventry, which has not been felt since 1842'.(4) The only dissentient was James Hart. He had seen the committee 'in the pleasantest manner possible ... but was firm in refusing to acknowledge any list whatever, or any rule but his own necessities and his own will'.(5) Hart was exploiting the current labour surplus to the full. For one type of plain ribbon the list price was 2s.9d., which in good times he paid; recently he had kept his outdoor weavers without

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(1) Coventry Standard, 2 June 1854.

(2) Coventry Standard, 16 June 1854.

(3) Coventry Standard, 19 May, 2 June 1854. Coventry Herald, 2 June 1854, 16 June 1854.

(4) Coventry Standard, 9 June 1854.

(5) Coventry Heæald, 16 June 1854.

work for twelve or fourteen weeks (which he was able to do since he had his factories to produce for him) and had then offered them 2s.3d., which they were glad to accept; he then kept them without work for eight weeks more and reduced the price to 2s. Hart's competition was the reason for the general abandonment of the list. A handbill of the Plain Weavers' Association asked, 'Has Mr. Hart resolved to be the Nicholas of Coventry?'(1) But by the end of July the committee of the Plain Weavers' Association had by endless negotiation, unmarred by any violence or breach of the peace, gained victory. All manufacturers except Hart had signed the list and Hart had agreed either to pay by it or not to give out any plain work at all in the outdoor trade 'rather than be any obstacle in the way', though it had taken much pressure from the weavers and, it seems, the other masters too to get him to do so.(2)

Hart fretted at the restriction; in the summer of 1855 he began to give out plain work below the list price. Both weavers and honourable masters were furious when they learned of his faithlessness. Thomas Read warned the outdoor weavers of the dangers that faced them, at a very crowded meeting in St. Mary's Hall. 'He commended those who had laboured to obtain an a-la-bar loom, and hoped they would make a noble stand, and not let such men as Mr. Hart bring them down to the position of those in the factories, which places he denominated as "hells of destruction".'(3) The committee of the Plain Weavers' Association saw him and he promised on his honour to pay by the list in future. Some honourable manufacturers were not satisfied with this: they wanted Hart to put it in writing. Some weavers agreed with them - but as one speaker pointed out at their meeting, if Hart was prepared to break his word, the fact that he had put it on paper would not deter him.

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(1) Coventry Standard, 9 June 1854. Coventry Herald, 16 June 1854.

(2) Coventry Standard, 23 June, 21 July, 28 July 1854. Coventry Herald, 28 July 1854.

(3) Coventry Times, 21 November 1855. This Read was an outdoor weaver. Another Thomas Read, a factory weaver, made a few months later an equally forthright denunciation of the factory system: 'For his own part he had always been opposed (not to the factory weavers) but to the factory system, because of its demoralising tendency, and its harmful consequences to the poor who were compelled to be its victims'. Coventry Weekly Times, 21 February 1856.

The meeting decided not to ask for his written undertaking.(1)

A few months later Hart was again the master most feared and disliked by the weavers. The weavers themselves were becoming more militant, as rapid technological change thrust against them. Early in 1856 the Ribbon Weavers' Association began a campaign for fancy and figured ribbons - an objective longed-for for many years. In the 1854 dispute the weavers had managed to get the masters to agree to pay for fancy ribbons 'according to difficulty', but this was of course no guarantee at all of standard prices. Prices differed greatly from one master to another and Hart's were among the worst. Daniel Butler and a deputation from the association went to see Hart, who received them angrily. 'Mr. Hart had told the deputation that the committee was a curse to the town.'(2) When challenged on his prices for fancy ribbons he lost his temper. 'The plain list I will pay, but if you as a committee interfere with my fancy trade, I will smash the whole list, though it cost me £500.'(3)

Nevertheless, the weavers' association went ahead with plans to gain a uniform list for fancy ribbons. The old argument that higher prices meant more money for the city's shops and standard

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(1) loc. cit. Coventry Standard and Coventry Herald, 23 November 1855. There are other indications of Hart's exceptionally thrusting and aggressive behaviour. There were six convictions of Warwickshire factory masters for infringements of the factory acts between 1839 and 1860: Hart was convicted three times for employing in all twenty-six women and young persons outside the permitted hours, or without keeping their names in a register. Two other manufacturers were convicted for single offences of the same nature, and Spencer and Horsfall were fined £10 for not fencing a shaft properly. P.P.: Reports of the Inspectors of Factories: [1439] H.C. (1852) xxi, p. 19; [1712] H.C. (1854) xix, p. 32; [1796] H.C. (1854) xix, pp. 24 et seq; [1947] H.C. (1854-55) xv, p. 26; [2247] H.C. (1857, Session 2) xvi, pp. 52 et seq. It should be added that Hart was the only Coventry manufacturer sufficiently energetic to send ribbons to the Paris Exposition in 1855 and that in 1858 a reading room at the Victoria factory for 500, provided with newspapers and more than 400 books, was opened by the Rev. W.T. Rosevear of Hay Lane Baptist Chapel. Hart 'alluded to the great pleasure it gave him in meeting his workpeople on that very interesting occasion, and of his willingness to assist them in every way possible in promoting their comfort and moral improvement'. Hart was a keen Baptist and played an active part in the work of the Coventry City Mission. Coventry Standard, 4 August 1854, 23 March 1855. Coventry Herald, 19 March, 21 May 1858.

(2) Coventry Weekly Times, 16 January 1856. The Coventry Times changed its title to the Coventry Weekly Times at this time.

(3) loc. cit. Coventry Standard and Coventry Herald, 18 January 1856.

prices more certainty (because less competition) for masters was again stressed; attempts were made to get the honourable masters on the weavers' side. But when approached the masters complained of competition in the fancy trade, and could promise nothing. The weavers' association had to stop its campaign. Daniel Butler regretted the need to do so, but saw no possibility of gaining a fancy list: reflecting the general apprehension amongst the weavers at the technological changes taking place he feared indeed that the plain list itself would soon be under attack.(1)

The competitive power of the steam factory was one danger to the outdoor trade: in 1854 and early in 1855 this had been aggravated by a slump. But by the summer of 1856 trade was good, there was work for all, and while the outdoor plain list held firm the factory workers on weekly wages won advances which reflected their increased productivity.(2) In September the Cash brothers offered to go over to piece-work in their factory when asked for an advance in weekly wages. The response of their weavers shows how much ideas had changed on this question since John Day's weekly-work system had been so detested. Of the 200 Cash factory weavers, only 6 were in favour of piece-work: the others agreed that the piece-work rates offered by the Cash brothers were too low, and that since factories were in any case bad places however the weavers were paid in them,

> they prefer a certain for an uncertain system of wages - they must bring grist to the human mill every week, let it come from where it will. There is no description of labour under heaven that works more mischief and ruin, when carried to an extreme, than that of the factory. The hardest and most stalwart frame speedily bends and fails beneath its stroke. Premature decay is the unfortunate lot of the great bulk of those under its influence. Think on this, and reflect that every ounce of gold in the coffers of your masters is partially coined out of the sweat and blood of the people - that their immense colossal fortunes are reared on a foundation, composed of your enfeebled and emaciated frames.(3)

The weavers argued that in the jacquard weaving (apparently the prevailing type at the Cash factory) the necessary and frequent stoppages of work to alter patterns meant that weekly work gave more security than piece-work because it made earnings more

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(1) Coventry Standard, 18 January, 20 March 1856. Coventry Herald, 18 January 1856. Coventry Weekly Times, 16 January, 19 March 1856.

(2) Coventry Standard, 2 February, 9 February 1855. Coventry Herald, 1 September 1854, 16 February 1855, 26 September 1856.

(3) Coventry Herald, 10 September 1858: handbill published during the dispute of 1856 by the General Committee of the Ribbon Weavers' Association, The test of a nation's prosperity is not in the accumulation but in the distribution of its Wealth.

predictable and it was fairer because it threw the cost of these stoppages on the employer. A handbill declared: 'compulsory piece-work is an insult to your manhood', and added that the Cash brothers should pay by the week, as Robinson, Iliffe and Peters, Henry Spencer, Eli Green and other honourable men did.(1)

The Cash brothers plotted, it was argued, 'by an ingenious and cunning devised system of piece-work' to reduce the earnings of their weavers to about 13s.4d. a week. This concerned the entire body of weavers. The Cash brothers would increase their profits and become more competitive; the security and earnings of the outdoor weavers would be eroded and thus piece-work 'most probably in a few years' time will concentrate the whole silk trade of Coventry into a few hands'.(2) Joseph and Josiah Cash declared that earnings would be much higher under their piece-work plan than the weavers predicted; they asked them to try the system for six months and pledged that if after that time earnings did not exceed the highest weekly wage paid in the trade they would return to weekly wages in their factory. The weavers would not accept and struck: faced by a united body of weavers who were urged by their union to be peaceful but not to blackleg, and unwilling to lose production when trade was booming, the Cash brothers gave in after the strike had lasted a week. They paid an advance in their weekly wages, which became the highest in the trade.(3)

A few weeks later the factory weavers of Spencer and Horsfall asked for an advance in their weekly wages. Spencer and Horsfall refused; their weavers struck and one of them cut his warps out of his loom before he left. Spencer and Horsfall locked the factory gates, and circulated the names of all 300 of their weavers to the other factory masters in such a way as to imply that they were joihtly responsible for the warp cutting. George Hall, a leader of the factory weavers, denounced the 'poor, wretched, degraded, misguided uneducated creature' who had cut the warps, deprecated the weavers' action in striking - 'for his part he was

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(1) Coventry Herald, 10 September 1858: handbill published during the Cash dispute by the General Committee of the Ribbon Weavers' Association, To the factory operatives and others.

(2) ibid: handbill, Thrice is he armed that hath his quarrel just.

(3) Coventry Standard, 26 September, 3 October 1856. Coventry Herald, 26 September, 3 October 1856, 10 September 1858 (handbills). Coventry Weekly Times, 1 October 1856. C.R.O.: MS diary of William Andrews, 19 September, 20 September, 27 September 1856.

sorry that the hands had been foolish enough to act injudiciously in not quietly working out their notice' - and denounced the unfair circular of Spencer and Horsfall. It had little effect anyway; Ratliffs, lacking good weavers at the boom time, took on as many as they could and paid them the extra shilling. Within a week Spencer and Horsfall gave in, took their hands back, and gave the advance.(1)

The outdoor weavers employed by the twenty manufacturers of fringed ribbons wished to be paid 6d. a lb. for winding the sewings used in their weaving. The Ribbon Weavers' Association took up their case in March 1857; Daniel Butler and a deputation from the association saw the twenty and gained the agreement to the payment of fourteen masters. The fringe weavers began the weekly payment of levies - 1d. for each handloom, 2d. for each engine-loom, 3d. for each a-la-bar loom - to build up a strike fund. But there was no strike; negotiations continued, conducted by a special committee of the Ribbon Weavers' Association. By the end of April three more masters had agreed. Further meetings of the fringe weavers and other members of the association were held; 2,000 attended one in May on Greyfriars Green. The association was flexible in its attitude: to accommodate those masters who said that factory competition prevented their paying the 6d. demanded it drew up a new list for fringed ribbons which was in effect about five per cent lower than its predecessor. By steady and persistent pressure, without striking or violence, the association gained the signatures of all masters to this list and the 6d. a lb. payment for winding sewings by August. It led to an increase in weavers' earnings.(2)

But the agreement compelled manufacturers to pay more for fringed ribbons woven outdoors than it cost the owners of the most efficient steam factories; one estimate, certainly exaggerated, put the extra cost at more than double.(3) Such disparities in productivity could be maintained only in times of boom. By the end of 1857 there was a slump in the ribbon trade which was worse than the normal winter slack time. Even the most efficient factories

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(1) Coventry Standard, Coventry Herald, 24 October, 31 October 1856, Coventry Weekly Times, 22 October, 29 October 1856.

(2) Coventry Standard, 27 March, 24 April, 22 May, 5 June, 12 June, 3 July, 10 July, 24 July, 31 July, 28 August 1857. Coventry Herald, 3 July, 14 August 1857. Coventry Weekly Times, 18 March, 1 April, 8 April, 15 April, 22 April, 29 April, 13 May, 20 May, 19 August 1857.

(3) Coventry Standard, 31 July 1857.

were on short time, working three or four days a week; many outdoor weavers were totally without work for many weeks. One factory which had recently opened - and which presumably possessed, therefore, the most up-to-date looms, was forced to close. The looms in Stephen Hammerton's factory were old and were unable to compete with those in the more modern factories. For years Hammerton had had no dispute with his weavers; he had paid satisfactory weekly wages. He now went over to piece-work payment; to throw the burden of his less productive machinery on to his workers. They faced a certain loss of wages: the outdoor weavers saw in Hammerton's action a latent threat to their list and their earnings. His hands struck, and were promised strike pay from a general levy of the entire trade. It seems that in such a time of dire distress this could not be raised: certainly, within a week his hands re-applied for their posts, only to find most of them filled by unemployed weavers from elsewhere.(1)

There was a slight improvement in the ribbon trade in mid-winter but in the spring (usually a boom season) the slump returned, being worse in some places than it had been before Christmas, and the effects of the underlying productive surplus were again felt, in both the outdoor and the steam factory trades. In the spring, Stephen Barnwell went bankrupt: his factories and looms were offered for sale but there were no offers for them.(2) The plain outdoor list came under attack. Jephcott, a plain weaver, 'found an instance when a dying husband and a starving family had compelled the woman to take work out at a reduced price, an instance which it was disgraceful, on the part of the manufacturer, to take advantage of'.(3) Only a few manufacturers did in fact abandon the list, and the chief villains were J.T. and W. Smith and Joseph Peters. The weavers appealed to their sense of decency. Yardley 'deprecated the conduct of those who wished to get rich out of the vitals of the poor, and believed, however long they might live, the thought of their oppression would plant a thorn in their dying pillow'.(4)

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(1) Coventry Standard, 13 November, 4 December, 11 December, 25 December 1857. Coventry Herald, 13 November, 20 November, 27 November, 11 December 1857. Coventry Weekly Times, 11 November, 18 November, 2 December, 9 December 1857.

(2) Coventry Standard, 15 January 1858. Coventry Herald, 24 December 1857, 15 January, 22 January, 12 March, 26 March, 30 April 1858.

(3) Coventry Weekly Times, 28 April 1858.

(4) loc. cit.

But Messrs. Smith blamed their action on the superior competitiveness of the factory looms and declared their intention of giving work out at the same price that it could be made in factories. Peters too said he meant to abandon the list. Wholesale destruction of the list was thus possible. 'Thus there were two out of eighty-two manufacturers who threatened destruction to that list which had been their bulwark and defence', said Jephcott.(1) Thomas Read urged upon the outdoor weavers 'the maintenance of the list at all cost of present sacrifice and toil, for if they lost it there were those who like ravenous wolves would seize on what they, as workmen, ought to realise'.(2)

To meet the crisis the outdoor plain weavers planned peaceful negotiation and pressure and a return to the tactic last used forty years before to maintain the list - the payment of doles to weavers who were offered work only at prices below the list. An extra weekly levy of ½d. a loom was added to the usual subscriptions in the outdoor trade, to act 'as a reserve fund to assist the most needy in slack times, that they might not become a prey to the worthless and avaricious ... a second entrenchment round the list ... in times of distress it would sweeten their own meal to know that the wants of their poor fellow workmen were provided for'.(3) Each district was to retain control of its reserve fund; thus in May the weavers of Hillfields formed 'a sympathetic society for the purpose of affording assistance to any member of the same who may lose his employment through refusing to take out work below the list of prices'.(4)

Negotiations with Messrs. Smith - the most recalcitrant masters - dragged on for months. The Ribbon Weavers' Association was confident at first that they would succeed by peaceful methods: 'they had conquered before and with truth and justice on their side, and the use of proper means, they would conquer again'.(5) They had the support of the honourable masters. Caldicott, Messrs. Pears, Franklin, Newsome, and Sargeant were named and thanked

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(1) loc. cit.

(2) loc. cit.

(3) loc. cit.

(4) Coventry Weekly Times, 28 April, 12 May 1858. Coventry Standard, 23 April 1858. Coventry Herald, 23 April 1858.

(5) Coventry Weekly Times, 28 April 1858.

for their active help in trying to get Messrs. Smith to abide by the list: 'as long as they had the support of those gentlemen, they might defiance to the efforts of any petty tyrants who were desirous to lower the prices paid to workmen'.(1) Thomas Read and Thomas Maclean stressed that the mayor - Charles Dresser, himself a silk wholesaler, sympathised with the outdoor weavers. 'He should not wonder if the Chief Magistrate was then employing himself in some way to assist them', said Maclean early in August. There was general sympathy for the outdoor weavers in the city; a party of weavers who attended Cow Lane Baptist Chapel early in August were given a markedly friendly reception.(2)

Meanwhile, twelve deputations had gone to see Messrs. Smith between April and July: some they refused to see, to others they gave evasive answers, and to one, at the end of July, J.T. Smith made his attitude clear. 'Well, I shall not acknowledge the list prices, but we shall in future conduct our business on the broad principles of political economy; when the trade is very good, you will have a very good price, and when it is bad you will have a bad price.'(3) The handbills and speeches of the weavers' leaders emphasised the gravity of the crisis, the ruin for both factory and outdoor weavers that defeat might bring, the need for unity and resolution to meet Messrs. Smith - yet at the same time the overriding necessity to remain peaceful so as to retain the support of the town.

> The crisis has now come, and every individual weaver ought to be prepared to make some sacrifice in maintenance of the all-important guarantee, viz, the list of prices for weaving and winding. A public meeting we must have and success must crown our efforts, as a failure would bring upon us and our posterity the most fearful disasters to the factory weaver as well as the outdoor work ... the loss of the list would be seriously felt throughout the whole weaving community in the extension of poverty, wretchedness and crime ... No half-measures will now answer; your own self-preservation is at stake.(4)

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(1) Coventry Herald, 30 July 1858. Coventry Standard, 30 July, 16 August 1858. NB the address from their workmen to Messrs. Pears and Franklin in September 1856, when presenting them with cups as testimonials of gratitude for 'your undeviating rectitude, your generous assistance in difficulty or affliction, or the noble stand you invariably took, when the question of the price for weaving ribbons was at issue, and last nor least, the honourable way in which you invariably offer to settle any disputes or misfortune'. Coventry Weekly Times, 24 September 1856.
(2) Coventry Weekly Times, 28 July, 4 August, 11 August 1858.
(3) Coventry Weekly Times, 4 August 1858; Coventry Herald, 30 July 1858.
(4) Coventry Weekly Times, 28 July 1858: handbill issued by the General Committee of the Ribbon Weavers' Association.

Meetings of the outdoor weavers followed almost nightly throughout the first three weeks of August. At one, held on Greyfriars Green, Maclean said:

> They had met again upon that spot which he called sacred. Upon that spot they had often contended for liberty and right; the name of that spot was known far and wide, and what had been done there had been felt in the Commons House of Parliament; and there they would meet and meet again, until the Smiths and all their kidney were brought up to the righteous standard of the list. (Cheers.)(1)

But Maclean was careful to end with praise of the honourable manufacturers, whose disapproval of the 'Johnnywops' was a great as theirs, and injunctions to behave peacefully to keep the support of the magistrates and the town. Thomas Read and Isaac Caldicott stressed the same point.

> There was a time when tyrants were visited by a long-eared animal, having upon him a bunch of ribbons; but they had no desire to adopt such a method; they wished to appeal to man's reason and sense of justice ... Let law and order be their motto, and then, with the blessing of God upon their efforts, they should again be successful.(2)

Dutton pointed out to the shopkeepers where their own interest lay: 'if only 6d. per piece was took from the weaver, it would rob this locality of £30,000 annually, which would be took from working men and given to wholesale purchasers'.(3)

One meeting ended with three cheers for the outdoor weavers, three for the factory operatives (whose support was asked for), three for the honourable manufacturers, and three for the town. There was no violence, though the outdoor weavers were said by the Coventry Standard to be getting more and more angry; the nearest approach to it was the parade on Greyfriars Green of a donkey, dressed out in ribbons, 'no doubt intended as a terror to evildoers'.(4) But weavers' contributions to the association's funds quadrupled in the first week in August: five more deputations visited Messrs. Smith, who signed the list and then retracted again, but who were induced to sign the list partly because of pressure on

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(1) Coventry Weekly Times, 4 August 1858.
(2) Coventry Weekly Times, 4 August 1858.
(3) loc. cit.
(4) Coventry Standard, 13 August 1858.

them from the public, a weavers' meeting was told by John Sheffield. This was at the end of August.(1)

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(1) Coventry Standard and Coventry Herald, 30 July, 6 August, 13 August, 20 August, 27 August 1858. Coventry Weekly Times, 28 July, 4 August, 11 August, 18 August, 25 August 1858. As important as these weavers' victories in the city in the period 1854-1858 was the inclusion of the weavers of north Warwickshire in the Plain Ribbon Weavers' and Factory Operatives' Associations: a development which almost certainly brought the Coventry lists of prices to the northern townships. See Section I of this chapter.

IV

The Dispute with the Factory Masters, 1858-1859

By the end of August a crisis had been reached in a much more serious and far-reaching dispute with the factory masters which involved the entire ribbon trade. Throughout their dispute with their outdoor weavers Messrs. Smith had argued that the competition of factory steam power, especially at a time of slump, made it impossible to pay by the list. During the depression in 1857 and 1858 the superior competitiveness of the factory system as a whole, and within the factory system of the most up-to-date machinery which had been installed in the previous few years, became increasingly obvious.

Because of the high productivity of these looms, the weavers who worked on them were paid by high weekly wages - and this helps to explain the popularity of weekly wages among the Cash brothers' factory weavers in 1856 - but the wages did not represent all the extra productivity of the most modern looms. The proprietors of the less modern looms, unable to compete with them, had for some years attempted to throw the burden of their technical backwardness onto their weavers by paying by the piece; thus Thomas Hennell paid by the piece in 1855 and in 1857 Stephen Hammerton returned to piece-work after paying weekly wages for some years. As technical advance rapidly continued the threat became more and more apparent to the weavers in the less productive factories and even more so to the outdoor weavers. What seemed likely was the undermining of the plain list and the reduction of piece-work prices for figured ribbons: and in addition the redundancy of a vast number of weavers whose competition would in turn affect the earnings of the weavers in the most modern factories. All types of weaver were directly interested. Thus in the spring of 1858 the Factory Operatives' and the Ribbon Weavers' Associations decided that the

only remedy was to enforce on factories which paid weekly wages piece-work rates which would destroy the superior competitiveness of the most modern factories and make secure the weavers elsewhere. The outdoor plain list and a newly composed list for figured ribbons were adopted for presentation to the factory masters.(1)

In September the Factory Operatives' Association attempted to explain the weavers' volte-face over the question of factory piece-work in the previous two years:

> The present agitation for piece-work among factory operatives arises from no fickleness or inconsistency on their part ... but it springs from a most settled conviction that has gradually been gaining ground among a portion of the operatives since 1848, and which the events of the last two years have more and more seemed to justify - viz, that unless the prices paid out of doors (after making due allowance to the manufacturer for his machinery, etc) could be established in the factories, the consequences would be most disastrous to the whole weaving community, both factory and outdoor.(2)

Fear of the superior competitiveness of the most modern steam factory was from the start of their campaign expressed by the weavers and their leaders. In May Haughton, a factory weaver, voiced a strong conviction that a just list of prices, when once established and determined upon, would put an end to that unprincipled competition which was disastrous alike to the manufacturer and the operative.(3) 'When they urged their claim for remuneration they were sometimes told that they would drive the trade away, while he could assure them that Coventry, by its low price labour, was driving the more honourable out of the trade.'(4) 'What they were contending for was important to the piece weaver, and to the man on weekly wages, for if the one went down the other would speedily follow.'(5) And, wrote a factory operative in August: 'Turn wheresoever we may, our unwilling gaze is ever attracted by the unequal contest incessantly enacting between man and gold. Man competing with man, and machinery, successful in its competition, is superseding all alike.'

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(1) Coventry Herald, 21 May, 23 July 1858. Coventry Standard, 28 May 1858. Coventry Times, 13 September 1855. Coventry Weekly Times, 19 May, 21 July 1858. George Hall, Prize Essay on ... A Board of Conciliation, etc (Coventry, 1861), p. 19. A figured list had to be written for the factory trade because the outdoor branch had no fancy list for the factory weavers to adopt. After the success of the factory weavers' campaign the outdoor weavers tried vainly to get a figured list in their branch. See below.
(2) Coventry Herald, 17 September 1858: weavers' handbill.
(3) ibid., 21 May 1858.
(4) Coventry Weekly Times, 19 May 1858.
(5) ibid., 21 July 1858.

The remedy was a uniform list of prices for piece-work in factories and the end of the weekly wage system.(1)

Negotiations continued for months. The factory weavers paid an extra 1d. a week each from May onwards - to build up a strike fund - met often, paraded with the outdoor hands, carrying banners - 'The interests of the Manufacturer and Workmen are one, where honour presides', and 'Peace, Law and Order' - and were told by their leaders of 'the necessity of organisation, self-reliance, and a quiet, but earnest agitation in order to secure such a list of prices as should be fair alike to the manufacturer and the weaver'.(2) 'They have' (said the Herald) 'altogether avoided the coarseness which too frequently characterises and embitters contests between employers and employed'.(3) They could still make themselves unpleasant to obstinate masters. Their tactics were described by William Andrews, the Cash brothers' factory manager. He was visited by a weavers' deputation on 18 June, and declined to sign the factory list. The next day the deputation returned; he still refused. The weavers then saw Joseph Cash, and not getting any satisfaction from him, came again to see Andrews at the beginning of July.

> A final deputation wait on me this morning, to know if I will sign the list. They threaten that they will have a meeting at St. Mary's Hall. They had a paper signed by most of my hands - 'That we are of opinion that the conduct of Mr Andrews as reported by the deputation that have waited on him is most despicable, and we are determined to use every means', etc., etc. 6 July Mr John Cash insists I hold out saying that if I cannot, he will shut up the business.

But two weeks later the deputation returned. 'The committee come to see me - I defy them. They go to Mr Joseph Cash; he defers them till Mr John comes home next week. See Mr Joseph tonight. He tells me to give in.' A few weeks later John Cash said the same. 'It is much to my annoyance as it was by their advice I refused at first.' Andrews signed the list on 27 August.(4)

Cash's were the only weekly-paying masters to sign the list. Because of their highly productive looms, they naturally had more

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(1) ibid., 18 August 1858.

(2) Coventry Standard, 28 May 1858. Coventry Herald, 21 May, 23 July, 13 August 1858.

(3) Coventry Herald, 20 August 1858.

(4) C.R.O.: MS diary of William Andrews, 18 June, 19 June, 21 June, 2 July, 6 July, 21 July, 24 August, 25 August, 26 August, 27 August 1858.

reluctance to sign than the piece-paying firms, all of which had signed by the end of August. For them the only increase in costs would be for figured ribbons, now 'listed', and in any case the piece-paying masters had the less modern looms and could look forward, when the weavers had succeeded totally, to a great increase in the costs of their competitors with the most productive machinery, the manufacturers who paid by the week. Only two piece-paying masters had to be brought to agreement by a strike: Spencer and Horsfall, who soon capitulated,, and J. and C. Ratliff, who were more refractory. They wished to go over to weekly wages anyway - apparently because they had installed the more productive looms which would give their employees greatly increased earnings at list prices, and which, under the weekly-wages system, would permit them to make a small advance in earnings while retaining for themselves much of the increment of productivity. The mayor tried to get Ratliffs to give way: but they refused to sign the list until the weavers agreed that the hard core of weekly-paying masters were forced to pay either the list prices, or an 'equivalent' in weekly wages that would eliminate their greater competitiveness. Receiving this guarantee from the weavers, Ratliffs signed.(1)

The tactics of the weavers had been to negotiate separately with the different groups of masters, taking on the least unsympathetic first and leaving to the end the most productive and therefore most recalcitrant masters.(2) By the end of August these had to be tackled. The weavers began with a monster parade, said by the press to be the largest since 1819 and estimated to consist of between 4,000 and 8,000. Its purpose was to show the 'union which exists between all branches of the ribbon trade'. The procession of outdoor and factory weavers, with bands and banners, wound through the city to Greyfriars Green, where they were addressed by Haughton and Thomas Read, representing the factory and the outdoor branches, on the need for the list.(3)

The reply of the weekly-paying manufacturers(4) was to issue

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(1) Coventry Standard, 23 July, 20 August, 27 August, 3 September 1858. Coventry Herald, 23 July, 13 August, 20 August, 27 August, 3 September 1858. Coventry Weekly Times, 30 June, 7 July, 21 July, 18 August, 25 August 1858.
(2) The committee of the Factory Operatives' Association admitted as much to John Ratliff when they saw him; see Ratliff's letter, Coventry Standard, 10 September 1858.
(3) Coventry Standard and Coventry Herald, 27 August 1858. Coventry Weekly Times, 25 August 1858.
(4) The five signatories were James Hart, John Day Jun., G.A. Pridmore, Iliffe, Peters and Hamer, and Thomas Robinson.

a handbill that ridiculed the piece-paying masters, with their 'old, worn-out and useless looms'; praised their own new and expensive machinery which had permitted them to make three advances in weekly wages in three years and which alone in future would sustain Coventry in its competition with foreign producers; pointed out that this foreign competition was at present helping to cause a stagnation of trade: refused to pay the list or an 'equivalent' or to give any further increase which would reduce their competitiveness; and promised that an attempt to force any one of them to do any of these things would be followed by a joint lock-out until the agitation stopped.(1)

The reply of the weavers' association was a counter-handbill condemning 'brutalising slavery, downright abject and prostrate subjection ... Yes, their wives and daughters walk about in jewellery and gold, while they retire in the prime of life upon colossal fortunes.'(2) James Hart was the leader and inspiration of the five and the author of their handbill.(3) Before it was published, said Haughton, the weavers would have been content with the 'equivalent' but now it was 'piece-work and piece-work only. (Cheering)'(4) ... 'the list and nothing but the list'.(5) The factory weavers determined upon a victory. The hands of Iliffe, Peters and Hamer gave in their notice upon their masters' refusal to sign the list; the other four manufacturers immediately gave one week's notice to their hands, to take effect on Saturday, 4

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(1) Coventry Standard, 3 September 1858. The masters' case was also put by G.A. Pridmore's letter to the Coventry Herald, 10 September 1858: 'They will not consent to have a logger put on them that shall cripple them as much as old and worn-out machinery does their neighbours'.

(2) Coventry Standard, 3 September 1858.

(3) NB the speech of Joseph Hall. 'Their chief opponent was a man who owned a place called "Victoria's Factory", and it was a shame that he should assume such a name for it, for Victoria was a name that carried with it benevolence, and all that was upright and just - it ought to have been called the House of Bondage; and it was to deliver them from this land of Egypt that they were now fighting.' Coventry Herald, 1 October 1858. See also the letter in the Coventry Weekly Times, 29 September 1858: 'Mr. Hart's factory! Yes, there it stands, the great monster! Manufacturers and weavers look with horror as they pass the place and think that it is destined to sink them in one vortex of ruin. Take heart, brave citizens, the great "Malakhoff" will yield yet.'

(4) Coventry Herald, 3 September 1858. There is no evidence elsewhere for this statement.

(5) Coventry Standard, 3 September 1858.

September. The factory weavers, having raised their weekly strike levy in the third week in August to ½d. in the 1s. (from 1d. per week - a six-fold or ten-fold increase) raised them again to 1d. in the 1s. in the week before the lock-out. At the same time the outdoor weavers agreed unanimously at their meeting on Greyfriars Green to pay 1s. per week for each a-la-bar loom and 6d. for each handloom to the strike fund; Joseph Taunton, the chairman, asked any factory operatives present not to put up their hands so that the unanimity of the outdoor weavers would be apparent. Thomas Read of the outdoor trade said that 'the factory operatives were so closely allied to themselves in their interests that they might say they were one, for if they failed to secure their list, that of the outdoor hands would be in jeopardy'.(1)

The weavers' leaders emphasised that they had no quarrel with the piece-paying manufacturers, who had accepted the lists of prices and were paying by them; Maclean mentioned their 'very cordial feeling' towards their workpeople and accepted as reasonable their stipulation that if the strikers were unsuccessful in gaining the list they should be free to return to the old rates of pay so as not to be at too much of a disadvantage compared to the weekly-paying masters. Maclean 'congratulated the meeting that no old-fashioned firm was to be found in combination against them'. Haughton said that 'it did not become the operatives to allow the honourable manufacturers to suffer in order that the man who unfairly put the screw on his work-people might fill his pockets'.(2) At another meeting of weavers it was even announced that the piece-paying masters were to be asked for contributions to the strike fund. Support from the city at large was also asked for.(3) The price of this was moderation. 'If any man', said Haughton, 'created, or tried to create a disturbance, they would at once hand him over to the Police'.(4) The 900 weavers working out their week's notice were advised by Haughton to work well 'and in all respects to conduct themselves properly'.(5) 'He hoped they would

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(1) Coventry Standard and Coventry Herald, 3 September 1858. Coventry Weekly Times, 25 August, 1 September, 8 September 1858. C.R.O. MS diary of William Andrews, 4 September 1858.

(2) Coventry Herald, 3 September 1858.

(3) Coventry Weekly Times, 8 September 1858. Coventry Standard, 3 September 1858.

(4) Coventry Herald, 3 September 1858.

(5) Coventry Weekly Times, 1 September 1858.

preserve their self-respect - their cause was just, and they could gain their ends without having recourse to dishonourable means.'(1)

The lock-out began on 4 September.(2) Throughout the eight weeks of the dispute the weavers were constantly urged at their many meetings to keep the peace, while their leaders leaned over backwards to convince the city of their moderation. In the middle of September the mayor was asked by the Factory Operatives' Association's committee for leave to parade the streets with a banner and a band. He allowed the procession, but refused the banners and the band, since any incitement might cause a breach of the peace. Some weavers did bring two banners: the committee then promptly left the procession, taking with them as many weavers as they could convince and leaving the parade much reduced. The committee then asked the Herald to announce that it was positively against their instruction that the mayor's wishes had been flouted and that they would try to prevent the use of banners in future. The lock-out masters were denounced as the 'Bunch of Six' and James Hart, hated as their leader, was 'assailed with violent language and coarse epithets' as he walked down Far Gosford Street.(3) Tempers rose (as the Coventry Herald, rather sympathetic towards the weavers, admitted) when James Hart closed his Bedworth factory on 9 October because the weavers there had been contributing to the strike fund, and when John Day opened his factory to blackleg labour. But Daniel Butler and Thomas Read advised the weavers to treat the blacklegs with 'silent contempt'(4) and when the few who dared to enter Day's factory came out in the evening the crowd round the gates merely insulted them. No breaches of the peace occurred during the lock-out.

There was merely the slightest conflict between the weavers' leaders over the tactics to be employed. Middleton argued at a meeting in the Corn Exchange on 16 September that all clergymen and ministers in the town should be asked to collect for the weavers' fund at their services: Maclean said that this was not sensible

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(1) Coventry Herald, 3 September 1858.

(2) The 5 signatories to the handbill were joined by F.J. Gilbert in locking out their weavers.

(3) Coventry Standard, 24 September 1858.

(4) Coventry Standard, 8 October 1858.

and urged moderation. Over aim and principle there was no conflict among the leaders and far less among the rank and file than might have been expected. Many of the first-hand journeymen of the city, who were paid by the list for the ribbons turned out by their looms, often paid their own journeymen weekly wages only two-thirds as great as those that could be gained in the most modern factories. The weekly-wage system offered secure earnings to factory hands (and this had of course been a motive for the Cash brothers' weavers' opposition to piece-work in 1856) and there were occasional letters from factory weavers (or their wives) who regretted the dispute and wished to return to their high and secure weekly wages, and the fringe benefits of the modern factories - the reading room and the burial club.(1)

At the end of September the six masters offered to re-open their factories for weavers who were prepared to work for the old rates of weekly wages, provided that enough weavers to make the opening profitable enrolled. In the event only Day thought it worthwhile to open and he attracted very few. Fear of the strikers was one explanation for the lack of blackleg labour: but an incomplete one, since the fear itself implied unity among the weavers at large: the factory hands, the first-hand journeymen, and their employees. Throughout the dispute the words and actions of the weavers reveal an evasion of the six masters' arguments that only the most modern factories could hope in the long run to compete with the foreigner, a fear of the threat offered to the outdoor trade by the galloping pace of technical progress in them, and a dislike of factory discipline itself. This last was the reason why so many journeymen's journeymen preferred working outdoors for weekly wages lower than the weekly wages in Hart's factory:(2) the same hatred was even stronger in the first-hand journeymen who had their high standard of living outdoors to lose as well, should the most modern factories be allowed to maintain their productive advantages. At the Corn Exchange meeting on 16 September Middleton said that 'He

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(1) See the letter from 'one tired of being about' and a long statement by a factory weaver's wife in the Coventry Standard, 1 October 1858.

(2) Thomas Read declared at the start of the dispute that it was the policy of the General Committee of the Ribbon Weavers' Association to compel first-hands to pay their journeymen by the list after the six had been beaten, to avoid 'hypocrisy' but this was certainly not done during the lock-out nor apparently after it. In view of the preponderance of first-hands and their families in the outdoor trade, the General Committee could hardly 'compel' this policy. Coventry Standard, 10 September 1858.

had heard that at one factory, meh had been paid to walk up and down, to see that each of the men were constantly at work, for which he received so much per loom; such a system was degrading to Englishmen, and he wanted to see the time when men will not, for the sake of hire, accept such a slave master's post.'(1) Factory discipline became especially oppressive when combined with the most up-to-date looms, large and heavy, and thus hard to work, and with the weekly-wage system that gave the weavers high wages but subjected them to the constant fear of the overlooker - the essential means for Hart and his friends to maintain high production and profits on very expensive machinery when weavers were not bound by the self-discipline of piece-work. The list would be for the factory hands of the six masters a means of securing not only higher earnings but greater freedom to work at a slower pace if they chose.(2) Weekly wages, said Maclean, 'subjected the operative to a slave-like practice of coercion'.(3)

P. Sowerby pointed out that under the list the slowest weavers would still earn, in the modern factories, as much as they then did by weekly wages, while the best could choose to earn much more if they wished. But he spoke above all for the outdoor trade - still the largest body of weavers - and reproached the six for their thrustful ideas. 'You think that machinery must be kept going - the trade would be much more healthy if it stood sometimes. Besides, looms out of doors have to stand, and looms in factories take no more harm than they.'(4) Over the outdoor trade and the old-fashioned masters was the threat of efficiency. Stevens,(5) speaking for the outdoor trade, said at the Corn Exchange meeting: 'If the factory system were allowed to progress as it had done in the past two years, and the factory masters were allowed to produce at half a fair cost, soon other manufacturers must become factory masters or retire from the trade'.(6)

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(1) Coventry Weekly Times, 22 September 1858.

(2) See on this point the revealing letter of Thomas Stevens, a weaver in one of the six's factories, and Edward Goode's comments: Coventry Weekly Times, 29 September, 6 October 1858.

(3) Coventry Standard, 3 September 1858.

(4) Coventry Herald, 10 September 1858.

(5) Not the Thomas Stevens, factory operative, mentioned in the preceding paragraph.

(6) Coventry Weekly Times, 15 September 1858.

About 1,000 operatives were thrown out of work when the lock-out began. Within a month the number had risen to over 1,100; 136 of the Cash brothers' factory weavers were thrown out because J. and J. Cash, while promising to pay by the list, refused to give out any more factory work while the dispute with the six continued. When Hart closed his Bedworth factory on 9 October 400 more weavers became idle. Thus an increasing number had to be supported by the two associations. At first the strikers were paid between 6s. and 9s. each - much less than their usual earnings: £368 were thus distributed in the third week in September. As the limited strike fund became exhausted and greater numbers became dependent on it levies were increased; at the Corn Exchange meeting of 16 September the factory weavers agreed to double theirs to 2d. in the 1s. - and offered to pay 3d. - while the first-hands of the outdoor trade doubled the levy on a-la-bar looms to 2s. a week, this 'being ungrudgingly responded to in almost every instance'.(1) The levy on outdoor handlooms stayed at 6d. The increase in subscriptions enabled the committee to pay an extra shilling a week to the strikers in the following week. Towards the end of September the outdoor first-hands at one of their meetings voted to pay 'more, if required, as long as necessary to establish the rights of the factory operatives'.(2) When the 400 weavers from Hart's Bedworth factory fell on the fund - costing it £130 a week more - the first-hands raised their levy to 3s. a week for each a-la-bar loom and 1s. for each handloom; the factory levy stayed at 2d. in the 1s. £423 were distributed in the last week of the strike.

The weavers in north Warwickshire also contributed to the fund. The Foleshill branch of the Ribbon Weavers' Association held a tea meeting of support at the end of August. A few weeks after the lock-out began the weavers of Attleborough, Bedworth, Foleshill and Nuneaton were contributing regular levies to the fund, 1d. in the 1s. being at first the levy from Nuneaton factory weavers. By the end of the dispute this rate had been doubled in Nuneaton and the outdoor first-hands or undertakers there were paying 2s. a week for each a-la-bar loom and 1s. for each handloom, while the Bedworth first-hands (even more involved because of the proximity of Hart's factory) were paying the Coventry levies of 3s. and 1s. a week

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(1) Coventry Herald, 24 September 1858.

(2) Coventry Herald, 1 October 1858.

respectively for a-la-bar looms and handlooms. There were contributions too from the power-loom weavers of Blackburn, and the ribbon weavers of Derby and Congleton, each of these last two groups giving £30 a week each: they were directly interested in the Coventry weavers' campaign, fearing the effect upon their own earnings of the triumph of the six masters and the low-cost factory. The colliers of Bedworth also contributed.

Almost every weavers' meeting in Coventry concluded with thanks to the shopkeepers and inhabitants of the city for their support. This was no mere ritual: the six masters became so angry with the support that the weavers were getting that they threatened to withdraw their custom from the offending tradesmen - without result. This help was usually in money, but occasionally in kind: at the beginning of October one flour wholesaler gave five sacks of flour to make Christmas puddings for the lock-outs. There were also gifts from about twenty friendly societies and Oddfellows lodges in Coventry, two benefit performances at the theatre by the Coventry Amateur Dramatic Society (of indifferent quality but to full houses) and a benefit cricket match. Sir Joseph Paxton, one of the city's M.P.s, gave £50 to the fund; the other, Edward Ellice, was in the U.S.A. at this time.(1)

Early in October the members of the Chamber of Commerce debated whether it could intervene in the dispute because of the harm it was doing to the city; they decided that the chamber's constitution precluded interference but offered friendly mediation as individuals if requested. It was not: both sides were set firm. One week

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(1) This account of the lock-out is based on Coventry Standard and Coventry Herald, 10 September, 17 September, 24 September, 1 October, 8 October, 15 October, 1858: Coventry Weekly Times, 8 September, 15 September, 22 September, 29 September, 6 October, 13 October, 20 October, 27 October 1858: Coventry Free Press, 1 October, 8 October, 15 October 1858. The remark of John Sheffield, that he was 'astonished that no teacher of Christianity in Coventry had come forward to vindicate the rights of labour', suggests annoyance at a lack of support expected as of right. Coventry Herald, 1 October 1858. The strikers did have the sympathy of Gem, the Vicar of Foleshill, and the active support of the Rev. J.L. Langridge of Nuneaton. 'He firmly believed that "Excelsior" was on their banner, and that they would the battle win.' He 'denounced the sin of covetousness, and passed a sweeping condemnation of the factory system. He contended that no woman ought to work in a factory. Home was the place for women. (Loud applause)' Coventry Herald, 1 October, 8 October 1858.

later a memorial from householders was presented to the Local Board of Health(1) asking for its mediation; the householders wanted the board to bring the manufacturers together and induce them to reach an amicable settlement with the weavers. No member of the board spoke against the weavers, though some were baffled by the conflict between industrial efficiency and the weavers' claims, validated by traditions and humanity. Sibley Whittem pointed out that the manufacturers themselves were divided on the question. William Taunton, the veteran radical and supporter of the rights of freemen and artisans, argued for mediation: so did W.H. Bray, a ribbon manufacturer who was not a party to the dispute. It was agreed that the mayor, Charles Dresser, should with a committee of six members of the board attempt mediation.

Dresser circularised the manufacturers asking them to attend a meeting in St. Mary's Hall. The six came, as did many others. The meeting decided that the six masters, and another six who employed weavers in the outdoor trade, should meet a dozen weavers to attempt to decide upon a list of prices for weaving in the outdoor trade and a scale or rate of wages founded upon this list for the factory trade. The masters laid down that the weavers' delegation should include at least one factory hand employed by each of the six masters in dispute, and that members of the Amalgamated Committees should be excluded - arguing that they did not know all seventy members of this body and they liked to know who they were dealing with.(2)

Dresser took this plan to the two committees who agreed to put it to a meeting of the associations, again held in St. Mary's Hall. The committees knew the answer the weavers would give to the plan and spoke against it themselves, though they thanked the mayor for his help and praised his conciliatory attitude. Daniel Butler and Haughton pointed out that enough money was coming in to sustain the strike for twenty weeks if necessary; there was every reason to carry on and not be duped by the six masters into conceding the continuance of weekly wages. Butler saw in the masters' desire

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(1) That is, the Town Council in its sanitary capacity. It sat far more frequently as the board than as the council: this seems to have been the reason for the memorial being presented to an apparently inappropriate body.

(2) Coventry Standard, Coventry Herald, and Coventry Free Press, 8 October, 15 October 1858.

to exclude the committees and necessarily include their own employees a plot to place their case in the hands of unskilled negotiators who would be afraid of discrimination thereafter if they did not accept their masters' views. Speaker after speaker denounced the masters' attempt to rig the negotiations as monstrous: the committees were given a vote of confidence by the 'thunderous' carrying of a resolution leaving the choice of delegates entirely in their hads, while the meeting chanted 'the list, the whole list, and nothing but the list'.(1)

In the event seven weavers were chosen from the Factory Operatives' Committee and six from the Outdoor Weavers' Committee, to meet the masters at a conference at St. Mary's Hall. James Hart acted as chief spokesman for the six: he urged the high earnings of the weavers in the most modern factories, the security offered by weekly wages, the danger of foreign competition driving the trade away from Coventry if full advantage were not taken of the most modern machinery. W.H. Bray, one of the masters who feared the competition of the most modern looms, spoke out in favour of the piece-work list and thought the danger of foreign competition had been much exaggerated. The weavers' spokesmen, chiefly George Hall for the factory weavers and Thomas Read for the outdoor, took the same line. Foreign competition was not really a menace. What was, said Hall, speaking as a factory weaver anxious for the prosperity of the entire trade, was the vicious depreciation of the earnings of the outdoor weavers and their absorption into factories. Besides, piece-work was fairer to the factory hand. No decision was reached after three hours of discussion and the conference adjourned.(2)

When it resumed, with Dresser in the chair again, the masters agreed to the principle of piece-work. The plain and figured lists were accepted. The six masters brought forward, however, a plan to compensate them for the extra cost of their expensive looms and thus to maintain some of their productive advantage: weavers on them were to pay a larger loom-hire than the usual one-third. But the weavers were adamant and said that one-third was all they could agree to. The conference adjourned again. Its final session was held from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. in the Craven Arms, and after much argument the six masters capitulated and accepted the lists with no

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(1) Coventry Standard and Coventry Herald, 22 October 1858.

(2) Coventry Standard and Coventry Herald, 29 October 1858.

more than the usual loom-hire. The masters as a whole ratified the result of the negotiations at a meeting, and a triumphal meeting of the weavers at the Corn Exchange did the same, thanking the mayor and the Board of Health 'for their kind and efficient services in bringing about a Conference of manufacturers' and the shopkeepers and inhabitants of the city for their contributions to the strike fund. The levies were now reduced by one half until the lock-outs returned to work.(1) The Coventry Free Press congratulated the weavers that their victory had been achieved without violence and donkeying, and hoped that it would be followed by goodwill between the disputants.

> The Operatives have exhibited in this struggle an amount of intellectual energy, moral discipline, and self-sacrifice, that must convince not only the Manufacturers, but their fellow-citizens, that they know their rights, and are prepared, at all costs, to defend them ... During the whole of the eight weeks the Operatives have been locked out from their employ they have manifested a calm rectitude, a firm resolve, a moral dignity that must have left an impression on the public mind that it will be well for those to meditate upon who may hereafter attempt to dictate upon what terms labour shall be rewarded ... Let every feeling of animosity and antagonism be obliterated from the minds of all parties, and each resume their various avocations with hearty good will, remembering that the petty individualism of a section of society must not stand in the high road of human progress.(2)

But these brave hopes were to be disappointed, both in the short term and the long. Immediately after the lock-out the committees of the manufacturers and the weavers met once more, under the chairmanship of the mayor, to discuss the setting up of a permanent body of arbitrators (composed of equal numbers of masters and weavers) to resolve any future disputes in the trade. There was general agreement for such a body: which would, as J.C. Farn and David Haughton pointed out, avoid both the misery caused by strikes and the 'degradation' of resolving disputes by legal action - generous and impartial though the weavers knew the justices to be. With expressions of good will to each other, both

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(1) Coventry Standard, Coventry Herald, and Coventry Free Press, 29 October 1858. Coventry Weekly Times, 27 October, 3 November 1858.

(2) Coventry Free Press, 29 October 1858. Immediately after the success of the battle for plain and figured lists in factories the outdoor weavers presented a figured list (which of course they so far lacked) to the manufacturers for their consideration. The manufacturers turned down the idea of a firmly fixed fancy price by one vote. The outdoor weavers then agreed among themselves not to take out jacquard work below the factory list price and continued to press the manufacturers. The dispute was still dragging on in the summer of 1860, when all existing lists were swept away. Coventry Free Press, 27 April 1860, Coventry Weekly Times, 7 March 1860, Coventry Herald, and Coventry Standard, 1 June 1860.

sides chose their representatives.(1) But the new 'Board of Trade' was stillborn; the feelings of trust which were necessary for vitality were lacking. Even as the preparations for it were under way a fresh dispute had broken out. Two factory manufacturers - Lester of Attleborough and Pridmore of Coventry - refused to sign the list of prices for factory work. Lester had only 20 looms in one 'flat' rented in a factory; Pridmore had about 200 power looms, in two factories - one in the city and one in Lockhurst Lane, Foleshill, just outside it. Lester refused to pay anyone by the list; Pridmore offered to pay weekly wages of 20s. for women and 24s. for men, or by the list, as weavers chose. The weavers' associations refused these terms and declared the dispute still in progress. The regular hands of each manufacturer stayed out and were supported by continuing levies, paid throughout the weaving area to the Coventry associations and disbursed by it to the strikers. Between £70 and £80 a week were spent on pay for the lock-outs; weavers received 14s. a week and their pickers-up 7s.

Pridmore succeeded in getting some blacklegs. Though he had to recruit many from the brothels of Coventry there were, as the weavers' leaders admitted, some weavers so inexperienced that weekly wages suited them more because they could earn more by them than by piece-work. But, Thomas Read of the outdoor trade pointed out, did not the opposition of the thrusting masters to piece-work show that it would increase the earnings of most weavers?(2) Even the Coventry Herald, by now almost totally opposed to the weavers' cause, admitted that the factory weavers

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(1) Coventry Standard, 29 October, 17 December 1858, 4 February 1859. Coventry Herald, 10 December, 17 December 1858, 4 February 1859. Coventry Weekly Times, 9 February 1859. For the new arbitral body, the Silk Manufacturers' Association was given a more formal structure than hitherto. It chose a committee of ten, which in time of dispute was to choose three to meet the weavers' representatives. These were also to total three, chosen by a panel of twelve, consisting of six outdoor and six factory weavers - half of each group being chosen by Coventry weavers and half from weavers outside the city. This last fact is a graphic reflection of the increasing unity of the weaving body, to which the concurrent geographical extension of their trade union also bears testimony. The 'Board of Trade' of six arbitrators were to choose an independent chairman.

(2) Read continued: 'Many who worked in factories did not above half know their trade, and he could easily understand that they would prefer weekly wages to the present system, but all really good workmen would prefer to be paid just what they earned - no more and no less'. Coventry Herald, 18 February 1859.

who wished for weekly wages were in the minority. The attitude of Peter Paul of Nuneaton was typical; earning £2 a week by piece-work since the lock-out, he was glad to pay the levy to prevent the piece-work system from being undermined.(1) Many weavers were bitterly angry with the two manufacturers and their blacklegs, who menaced all they had fought for. There was more violence than there had been during the lock-out. A van delivering silk to Pridmore's Lockhurst Lane factory gave a lift to some blacklegs. The van was stoned and overturned. Later that day, a crowd of 1000 was waiting outside the gates when the blacklegs emerged. Three were wounded. The windows of the factory were broken. Order was restored by policemen from Coventry. One woman was fined £2 for throwing stones and two more bound over for three months for threatening behaviour. Despite the leniency of these sentences, however, the violence was stopped, by the efforts of the weavers' association's leaders. And they negotiated hard with the two masters: inducing Pridmore to give in, apparently by February. Lester was more obstinate - partly, as Jephcott revealingly admitted, because his remoteness from Coventry made it harder fof the committee to press him as they would have been able to do in the city. But in the spring even Lester gave in: not by agreeing to pay the factory list, but by giving up factory work altogether. By that time, however, the weavers had a much more serious dispute on their hands, with their old adversary, James Hart.(2)

Soon after his capitulation in October 1858 Hart had wished to alter the list; he proposed to increase the list price for the best ribbons by one-sixth but reduce the price for cheap ribbons by a similar proportion. The Silk Manufacturers' Association supported Hart's plan. The weavers were to agree, later, that there were anomalies in the list. But their initial reaction to the proposal was hostile. Hart's own motives were distrusted; he had only two

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(1) The Rev. J.L. Langridge of Nuneaton - still an ardent supporter of the weavers - described the issue thus: 'Truth must triumph. Truth is the stone which we sling, and, guided by the God of Truth, it shall lodge in the heads of the giants' oppression and error and level them to the dust.' Coventry Weekly Times, 10 November 1858.

(2) For the dispute with Pridmore and Lester, see Coventry Standard, 12 November, 19 November, 10 December, 17 December, 24 December 1858, 18 February 1859. Coventry Herald, 5 November, 12 November, 19 November, 10 December, 17 December 1858, 28 January, 18 February 1859. Coventry Weekly Times, 10 November, 1 December, 8 December, 15 December, 22 December 1858, 16 February, 23 February, 30 March, 22 June 1859. Coventry Free Press, 10 December 1858, 11 February 1859.

or three looms on the best goods and the changes would be much to his advantage overall. The conciliation committee was convened to arbitrate in the matter. The weavers' side, however, said they had no power to alter so fundamental a thing as the list. The Factory Operatives' Committee was highly suspicious of arbitration because Hart would be a member of the arbitral body; as the owner of one-quarter of the power looms in the trade he could, Hart said, 'justly take a leading part in whatever affected the system'.(1) Arbitration was dropped. But the weavers declared at meetings their opposition to alteration of the list by any method, since (this was the crucial issue) any change would affect not only the factory weavers but also the outdoor trade, which had so strongly supported them in the lock-out. On 19 April George Horsfall, the secretary of the F.O.C., conveyed to the manufacturers the refusal of the weavers to consider any alteration.

In anticipation of a change in the list Hart had started to pay by the new prices in March; fifty of his factory weavers in Coventry, and forty in Bedworth, refused to accept the new rates and went on strike, being supported from the association's funds; levies of 6d. a week were paid by factory weavers and 2d. a week by their ancillaries. When Horsfall's final refusal of any alteration came, Hart decided unilaterally to tear up the list for plain ribbons and pay for these by weekly wages only. He offered to pay weavers 19s. a week, in return for a work-norm of twenty pieces, plus a bonus of 2s. for extra production. His production costs would then be cut to 2s.6d. a piece - as against 4s.3d. or 4s.6d. a piece previously, by the list of prices. Hart's action widened and sharpened the struggle. As in the previous summer, the fortunes of all weavers were now closely connected with the continuance of the factory list. Thomas Read described to a weavers' meeting in St. Mary's Hall the fruits of list-work. 'He said they had felt the sweets of liberty; like a dog that had been chained and let loose, when you offer to put the collar on him again, how skulkingly he comes. It was so with them; they would not willingly return to bondage.'(2) At another meeting, 'Mr. Haughton ...

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(1) Coventry Weekly Times, 4 May 1859. Hart was also vice-president of the Silk Manufacturers' Association.

(2) Coventry Weekly Times, 25 May 1859. NB also the speech of Bradbury in ibid., 20 July 1859. 'Mr. Hart wants to establish the weekly wages system, and if anything is akin to slavery the weekly wages system, as practised in Coventry, is. Indeed, it has some features in it that were worse than African slavery itself, for the slaveholder would feed and take care of his slave for his own sake, but here, with the weekly wages system and little or no wages, they would lose their liberty and anything like a comfortable existence together.'

forcibly urged the importance of the list to the weavers as a protection to them, and instanced the stockingers of Hinckley and the workpeople in cotton mills at Manchester, as examples of the low state to which they might be brought if they lost the guarantee of wages furnished by the list'.(1)

400 weavers at Hart's Coventry factory immediately went on strike; they were joined soon after by 300 at his Bedworth factory. They were supported by levies on all the Warwickshire trade: at first they were 1d. in the 1s. on factory weavers, ½d. in the 1s. on other factory workers, and 1s. a week for each a-la-bar loom and 4d. a week for hand-looms. These levies were doubled when the Bedworth weavers came out. Meetings of factory and outdoor weavers throughout north Warwickshire pledged their support:(2) the finances of the association were healthier towards the end of the strike than at the beginning - and an increase of 1s. a week in strike pay was made in June. Contributions were also made, as in the lock-out, by inhabitants of the city and friendly societies, and by the silk weavers of Derbyshire.

Some of the weavers in Hart's Coventry factory who were working on figured ribbons - and who, therefore, were still being paid by the list(3) - continued to work but, in support of their friends, did as little as possible. Their usual stint was six yards a day. They reduced it to 10" - forcing Hart to keep his looms going for no benefit. For much of the time they read newspapers and played cards. This the Herald with some under-statement described as 'a system calculated to entail inconvenience and loss upon Mr. Hart'.(4) But Hart had foreseen just this sort of trouble resulting from piece-

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(1) Coventry Herald, 13 May 1859. The most articulate defence of the weavers' case was put by Richard Hartopp, the veteran radical and onetime Owenite, in letters in the Coventry Weekly Times. '"All interference between labour and capital is unjust, tyrannical, and unwise, for the price of labour will find its own level, according to the comparative scarcity or plenty of the article" - Such is the doctrine of the Manchester School ... but ... I contend that the application is one-sided ... I assert that capital being possessed with a monopoly of machinery and social power, uses that power so as always to ensure the supply of hireable labour remaining greater than the demand, so as always to keep a competitive reserve in the labour market, by which to force wages down, and keep the wage slave beneath the heel of capital ... Machinery ought to be, and might be made one of the greatest blessings to the working man, instead of which it has been made a fearful curse ... it has been used to displace labour and to make fewer men necessary.' 27 July 1859. See also the letters in ibid., 20 July, 3 August 1859.

(2) NB the speech by Jephcott, a Foleshill outdoor weaver, as reporte in Coventry Weekly Times, 13 July 1859: he stressed that this was as much the outdoor weavers' struggle as the factory weavers'. 'He did not work in a factory; but he felt bound to assist those that did.'

(3) Hart had turned to weekly wages for the weavers of plain ribbons only.

(4) Coventry Herald, 13 May 1859.

work and had induced weavers to sign a contract guaranteeing constant work.(1) Hart brought prosecutions for breach of contract against seventeen weavers. When the cases of the first four were heard at Coventry petty sessions Abijah Hill Pears, plainly feeling determined to be impartial in a dispute that concerned a fellow-master, asked the weavers to return to work to complete the pieces in their looms. They refused and were therefore sentenced to one month's hard labour. Seven others followed them. The weavers' association quickly engaged a better lawyer - William Prowting Roberts of Manchester, onetime Chartist. He appeared for William Powney and five others. Hart's foreman gave evidence about Powney. 'I saw him twice in the course of Friday sitting on a loom with others. I have seen hands during the week playing at bat and ball, standing in groups, sleeping, talking, and walking about.'(2) But Roberts was able, by dense legal argument, to show that the contract was invalid. The six were discharged and 'were greeted with loud cheers by the vast assemblage outside the court'.(3)

More trouble was caused by the blacklegs Hart engaged for his Victoria factory.(4) He found difficulty in doing so - and was willing to pay 28s., under the weekly wages system, for the weaving of some goods for which the list price was only 14s.8d.: so anxious was he to win the battle.(5) Haughton declared at a weavers' meeting in St. Mary's Hall that 'their families were deprived of support by a skulking set of underlings, the muffs and duffers of the trade, who were making a harvest just now, when it suited Mr. Hart's purpose to pay any sort of money to get people to work'.(6) But he and the other læders appealed several times to the weavers not to commit breaches of the peace. For the first time since the Beck mill-burning, these appeals were disregarded. The black-legs' leader was John Mills - 'Satin Jack'.(7) He had been on strike

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(1) These contracts appear to have been introduced by Hart after his agreement to pay by the list in October 1858.
(2) Coventry Herald, 20 May 1859.
(3) loc. cit. A few weeks later the county magistrates dismissed a similar action brought by Hart against one of his Bedworth weavers, Payne, and the city magistrates the case against another nine Coventry weavers. Roberts again acted for them. Coventry Standard, 17 June 1859. Coventry Herald, 17 June, 24 June 1859.
(4) Hart recruited stockingers for his Bedworth factory.
(5) The ribbons in question were apparently difficult articles for which rare skill was required.
(6) Coventry Standard, 27 May 1859.
(7) He was also called 'Oriental John': both sobriquets referred to the types of ribbon he wove. Another of Hart's blacklegs was called Carrotty Poll.

from Hart's factory in April, but in May was induced by Hart to return to work for weekly wages. Mills and another blackleg were wounded by weavers in Hales Street. Hart immediately brought prosecutions for assault against thirteen, of whom seven were sentenced to one month in prison. A.H. Pears appealed to the weavers' committees for help in stopping the violence; they asked for calm. But throughout May Satin Jack and his associates had to be protected by police on their way to and from work, and even so many blacklegs were attacked. By the beginning of June tempers were rising greatly. The magistrates issued proclamations against breaches of the peace and unlawful assembly. The notices were torn down - an unprecedented action. On the evening of Monday, 6 June a crowd of between 2,000 and 3,000 weavers waited outside the Victoria factory. When the blacklegs emerged they and the policemen guarding them were attacked with stones, brickbats and watering cans. One policeman's helmet was cut through, another was wounded in the back. The blacklegs were put in the lock-up for their own safety. Afterwards they slept in the factory. More rioters were sent to prison. The magistrates forbade all large assemblages except, significantly, meetings of the weavers' associations themselves. Fifty men from the county police force were brought in to Coventry to enforce the prohibition. By the end of the week the city was relatively quiet - though blacklegs were still molested.(1) Soon after, released prisoners wearing placards inscribed 'These are Paddy Hart's victims' were given the place of honour at weavers' meetings. The response of both factory and outdoor weavers to the new situation was to pass unanimous resolutions of continued support for the strike and to pay their levies more willingly; it was immediately after the June disturbances that the weekly strike pay was increased by a 1s. Significantly, contributions from city shopkeepers kept up. The ribbon manufacturers had mixed feelings. They resented the weavers' refusal in March to consider their proposal that the list should be altered, and the SMA refused to arbitrate in May, when approached by the weavers' associations.(2) They disliked violence and feared the

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(1) NB the letter from 'Liberty', referring to the June days, in Coventry Standard, 8 July 1859. 'I witnessed scenes which I imagine are not exceeded in any penal settlement, exerted towards those who wish ... to pursue their lawful occupations as weekly workers.' 'Liberty' recommended that those who wished to work for weekly wages should form a Weekly Wages Protection Association.

(2) At the same time, the magistrates were also asked by the weavers' associations to persuade Hart to pay by the piece. The weavers pointed out that this would be the most effectual way to stop violence The magistrates refused to intervene.

results for them if the weavers crushed Hart totally. This seemed a possibility by early July, when cheers greeted the proposal of Thomas Read (outdoor) that Hart's outdoor weavers should strike against him. On the other hand, no manufacturer was willing to follow Hart's example and abrogate piece-work, and the more inefficient among them actively feared - as they had a year before - the results for them if Hart succeeded in lowering his production costs by making weekly wages permanent. Both weavers and masters had an interest in ending the dispute and bringing Hart to heel. Early in July negotiations began between the weavers' and manufacturers' associations. The manufacturers agreed to bring pressure to bear on Hart if the weavers agreed to a revision of the list. At length, Hart and five other manufacturers met six weavers, with Alderman Browett, the president of the manufacturers' association, as chairman.(1) The weavers agreed to a one-sixth reduction for cheap plain goods in the list and an increase of one-sixth in the richest goods. In return Hart gave a written undertaking to stop weekly wages and abide by the list, to dismiss all his blacklegs and to re-employ all his previous factory hands, save three strike leaders.(2)

The weavers had gained a victory on the essential point - the list.(3) The dispute, of fifteen months' duration, had cost the weavers' association £7,568 in strike pay; £2,178 of this had been subscribed by the outdoor trade, £1,678 by the weavers of Derby, Leek, Congleton and Manchester, £1,026 by tradespeople and friends of Coventry, and the rest by the factory weavers of the city.(4) The weavers believed that at this cost they had gained

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(1) This arbitral body was, though double its size, composed in the same way as the conciliation committee or Board of Trade agreed upon some months before.

(2) Hart provided a living for Satin Jack - apparently outside Coventry.

(3) For the dispute with Hart, see Coventry Standard, 18 March, 15 April, 6 May, 13 May, 20 May, 27 May, 3 June, 10 June, 17 June, 24 June, 15 July, 22 July, 29 July 1859; Coventry Herald, 18 March, 15 April, 6 May, 13 May, 20 May, 27 May, 3 June, 10 June, 17 June, 24 June, 1 July, 15 July, 22 July, 29 July 1859; Coventry Weekly Times, 16 March, 20 April, 4 May, 11 May, 18 May, 25 May, 1 June, 8 June, 29 June, 6 July, 13 July, 20 July, 27 July; Coventry Free Press, 18 March, 15 April, 3 June, 24 June, 22 July 1859.

(4) Coventry Standard, 23 December 1859.

the promise of a new era of peace and prosperity. When Hart capitulated Thomas Read, one of his bitterest opponents,

> congratulated Mr. Hart upon being present at the conference, and he was glad to see him manifest so good a spirit. A determined enemy sometimes became a friend; he hoped it would be so with Mr. Hart; he had faith again to believe that he would keep his word.(1)

At the end of the summer, as for many years, ribbon manufacturers and dyers gave dinners to their workers: the employees of Eld and Rotherham went to the King's Arms, Kenilworth, those of Hands and Son to the Horse Shoes, Bubbenhall, and those of Hawley and Hill to the Malt Shovel, in the same village.(2) But within a year the list system for which weavers had laboured so long had collapsed - irretrievably.

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(1) Coventry Herald, 29 July 1859.

(2) Coventry Standard, 9 September 1859.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE FREEMEN'S VOTE, 1832-1860

I

Liberal strength, 1832-1837

For the election of December 1832 Fyler was joined by Morgan Thomas, a solicitor. Both men were backed by men who had signed the anti-reform petition from Warwickshire - Charles Woodcock, R. Bunney, T.J. Wilmot, William Wilmot, W. Odell.(1) Fyler and Thomas argued strongly for the reimposition of the prohibitory laws on the import of foreign ribbons and the Tories of Coventry denounced Ellice and Bulwer for not trying hard enough for this. Prominent in this campaign against the liberal members was Isaac Johnson, a ribbon weaver who had supported Fyler in 1830 and who continued to do so.(2) At a public meeting in July the radical weavers Edward Goode and David Smith attempted to defend the record of Ellice and Bulwer; as a member of the weavers' deputation Smith had gone to London biassed against Ellice but 'his ingenuous and gentlemanly conduct in our cause, subdued my prejudices'.(3) But dissatisfaction continued among the weaving community over the failure of Ellice and Bulwer to support the prohibitionist campaign fully. 'Justus' called for votes against

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(1) Coventry Herald, 29 June, 27 July, 7 December 1832. C.W.C.: Broadsides Collection, 'An Elector and no Tory', Another Trick, December 1832.

(2) Coventry Herald, 6 July, 27 July, 3 August, 10 August, 17 August, 24 August 1832. C.W.C.: Broadsides Collection, circular letter of Morgan Thomas to the electors of Coventry, 24 November 1832.

(3) Coventry Herald, 13 July 1832.

them and described the effects of free trade

> We are left the hapless victims of legislative imbecility, with nothing before us but the prospect of the final extinction of our once flourishing business. Yes! this is the woe that is suspended over our heads; the dread calamity is hasting on with accelerated steps, and Coventry, instead of being styled (as at a former period of her history) 'The Chamber of Princes', will be more properly designated the forlorn mansion of poverty.(1)

Ellice and Bulwer faced pressure too from the members of the political union eager for a continuance of radical reform. In July a meeting of the union in the George Inn decided to call on the inhabitants of Coventry to demand from parliamentary candidates that they should support the abolition of the Corn Laws, the tea and sugar duties, and the newspaper stamp duty; that they should press for a general reduction in taxation, the equitable adjustment of the national debt, reform of the church, triennial parliaments, extension of the suffrage, and the secret ballot; and that they should agree to support any measure desired by three quarters of their constituents. The union agreed to support only those candidates who would accept these demands.(2) A fortnight later the union declared against Irish tithes and decided to demand from candidates pledges to vote against flogging in the army and navy and against child labour in factories.(3) Neither Ellice nor Bulwer met these demands. Bulwer expressed his strong support for the Coventry Political Union (4) but in his address declared against any military flogging, negro slavery and the corn laws, and for 'cheap bread'; most space was devoted to the unfair attacks on him over the silk trade question.(5) In July Ellice had made clear to the Secretary of the Coventry Political Union that since his own position in politics was assured and certainly did not depend on his being member for Coventry he was not going to fight for the seat, or visit it before the election, or compromise his principles to get the nomination - though he would accept it if offered.

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(1) Coventry Herald, 3 August, 10 August 1832. C.W.C.: Broadsides Collection, 'Justus and a £10 Voter', To the Freemen and Voters of the City of Coventry 10 August 1832. See also ibid., 'A Manufacturer' To the Manufacturers and Operatives Engaged in the Ribbon Trade, 8 August 1832.

(2) Coventry Herald, 13 July 1832.

(3) ibid., 27 July 1832.

(4) C.R.O.: Misc. Letters, H.L. Bulwer to Hickling, 22 August 1832.

(5) Coventry Herald, 10 August 1832.

> I shall take no notice of Mr. Fyler's address, and very little pains about a Coventry election. I am very much of Mr. Attwood's opinion, who begs even those friends who might be disposed to support him, rather from motives of private friendship than as concurring with him in publick principle, to withhold their votes, and give them to the representative, who they conscientiously believe is the best man to promote the publick interest ... I will neither take any measures to press my visit - or the least notice of what may pass in the mean time on the subject of the next election.(1)

In his address Ellice defended his refusal to press for the return of prohibition, arguing that it would be better to enable the silk trade to meet foreign competition by reforming the corn laws, reducing taxation, and ending smuggling. He ignored the political union's programme; it was, he argued, unnecessary for him once more to explain his general political principles, of which the city had already shown its approval. He favoured 'reform, retrenchment, and improvement in the general administration of the affairs of the country'.(2)

At the end of November Ellice arrived in Coventry for the election; his speech at the Craven Arms was interrupted by members of the political union wishing to know his opinions in more detail, and afterwards a deputation from the political union questioned Ellice again. Ellice declared in favour of the ballot, the commutation of tithes, and the repeal of the taxes on knowledge and the Septennial Act; but he refused to give pledges because his reformist opinions were well known. The council of the union met, with William Mayo in the chair, to consider the liberal candidates. A letter to it from Attwood clinched matters. Attwood argued that minor differences should be ignored in the interests of returning men to enable Grey to carry on reform. The political union endorsed the candidatures of Ellice and Bulwer and recommended its members to vote for them.(3) The final address of the liberals emphasised the need for reformists of all colours to rally round Ellice and Bulwer and catalogued Tory iniquities from the French War to the sufferings of Queen Caroline in 1820. Protection and other local issues must not be allowed to divide reformers. 'The contest is

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(1) C.R.O.: Misc. Letters, Ellice to Hickling, 11 July 1832.

(2) Coventry Herald, 24 August 1832.

(3) Coventry Herald, 30 November 1832. C.R.O.: Misc. Letters, Attwood to Hickling, 28 November 1832.

not particular but general; it is not provincial but national!(1) The political union asked for a quiet campaign; it would return its candidates 'without subjecting them to any expense' and asked all voters to eschew drink and violence;(2) the committee for Ellice and Bulwer expressed their desire 'to prevent unnecessary excitement'.(3)

Ellice had some months before pointed out to the secretary of the political union that foolish would be the reformer

> who supposes an election at Coventry has been, or will be, an affair of principle. True, that a reformer with money, may beat a candidate with, or without that essential 'interest' - but you know what chance a reformer without money, will have against an anti-reformer with a long purse. Nor would the fault lie with the reformers of Coventry.(4)

Ellice's money was used to ensure a liberal victory exactly as cash had been used by the Tories in 1826. Robert Randall (a prize-fighter and keeper of the Pack Horse public house) and many lesser men hired brickmakers, colliers and navvies from north Warwickshire - stronger men than ribbon weavers unused to heavy exercise - in the days before the poll; they included one famous local pugilist - Hammerton, the 'Chicken Butcher' - and at least one man who had been a special constable at the 1826 election. They lodged at public houses in the city, where the liberal leaders John Hands and Abijah Hill Pears visited them to wish them success. On the morning of the nomination, Saturday 8 December, they were given good breakfasts, tickets for food and drink, dark blue handkerchiefs, clubs and knuckledusters(5), and orders to 'rip up' the light blues. This dark blue mob was three or four times larger than the 100 or so 'strangers' that the Tories had and was able to drive Fyler and Thomas into the King's Head and beat up William Wilmot, Bunney and Charles Woodcock with impunity. Over the weekend (the poll of course was closed on Sunday) the Tories tried unsuccessfully to recruit a large mob - offering Randall's men more money to change

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(1) C.W.C.: Broadsides Collection, Reformers!, 7 December 1832.

(2) Coventry Herald, 7 December 1832.

(3) C.W.C.: Broadsides Collection, Coventry Election, 7 December 1832.

(4) C.R.O.: Misc. Letters, Ellice to Hickling, 1 March 1832.

(5) Or so T.J. Wilmot complained, giving a lengthy description of one: P.R.O. H.O. 52/20, T.J. Wilmot to the Earl of Warwick, 15 December 1832.

sides, while another pugilist, 'Fatty' Adrian, tried to hire men in Birmingham. On the morning of 10 December, the liberal mob was still larger - 2,000 or 3,000 in all, marching round the town like soldiers with Ellice and Bulwer with them for part of the time. The Tory mob tried to turn aside from them but was beaten up nonetheless, and melted away. Afterwards the dark blues, refreshed with gin and brandy, surrounded the hustings, with a drum and fife and a sheep's head on a pole. They 'Jefferyed and Barlowed' to frighten Tory supporters and those who still intended to vote were set on and thrashed before they could. The roof of the booth was covered with torn shirts. A surgeon tended the wounded. Many who intended to vote for Fyler and Thomas were deterred.(1)

The magistrates and police could not do much to stop the violence. Ironically, the mayor was R.K. Rotherham, a partisan of Fyler and Heathcote in 1826, and who desperately wished to avoid trouble now. The magistrates had become alarmed in the last week of November, when a small crowd of Tories had broken all the windows of the Craven Arms as Walker, the Receiver-General of Taxes, had been sitting in the parlour with £3,000 in sovereigns on the table in front of him and altogether £10,000 of government money collected from Warwickshire in the inn. The house was immediately barricaded. (2) In the days that followed, as information came from inhabitants about the plans for violence, the magistrates issued a string of progressively stronger warnings, culminating on 8 December with a firm declaration that any troublemakers would be arrested.(3) All the great leet constables, eighty in all, were called up, and more than 100 of the fittest pensioners as specials. These were not enough; as Rotherham complained to the Home Secretary, he could not by a recent law appoint electors as special constables yet 'the greater part of the male population are either renters of £10 houses or freemen and those that are not so, are the very men that are least to be depended on in suppressing disturbances and in fact too frequently are active parties in it themselves'. An overriding problem was that 'scarcely a character who is not a partizan on the

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(1) P.P.: H.C. 188 (1833) viii; Report from the Select Committee on the Coventry City Election Petition, pp. 17 et seq, 40 et seq, 55 et seq, 76, 90 et seq, 122 et seq, 154 et seq, 227 et seq.

(2) C.R.O.: Doggett Collection, Letters of John Carter, Richard Dewes to John Carter, 30 November 1832.

(3) C.W.C.: Broadsides Collection, Declaration of the Mayor and Magistrates, 3 December 1832; City of Coventry. Caution, 8 December 1832. Coventry Herald, 30 November 1832. P.P.: H.C. 188 (1833) viii, p. 230.

one side or the other exists in the city or even in the neighbourhood - so that the magistrates are placed in an exceedingly difficult situation very frequently'.(1) The soldiers from Coventry barracks were moved to Kenilworth and Meriden for the election and the magistrates hoped 'that there would not be an occasion to call for their services'.(2)

The specials recruited were too often old men and carried merely withies - more badges of office than weapons. The leet constables were fitter and had staves but there were too few of them and in any case some drank with the dark blue mob. Rotherham provided 100 special constables to take Fyler and Thomas to the hustings on nomination day, but after that he and the other magistrates could do no more than occasionally protect individuals though they stayed on duty all day. During the Monday Rotherham had a horse saddled and a messenger ready to take a letter (already written) to the commander of the Scots Greys at Kenilworth if the sheriffs should ask for military help. But the sheriff in charge, Adie Cramp (a Spon Street plumber) was a dark blue supporter, who throughout the poll refused to accept the request of Wilmot and Twist, the Tory agents, to call in troops or adjourn the poll so that the rioters would disperse.(3) Though Ellice sometimes intervened to protect a battered Tory voter, and on Saturday afternoon took Fyler and Thomas away from the hustings under his wing, he refused to try to stop the rioting. William Wilmot complained to him, 'This is a dreadful way the men are being beat', to which Ellice replied, 'It is not worse than 1826; it is what is usual at elections'.(4) Fyler and Thomas tried to stiffen the morale of their supporters by a broadside attacking

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(1) P.R.O.: H.O. 52/20, R.K. Rotherham to Melbourne, 9 December 1832. The act Rotherham complained about was 7 and 8 Geo IV, cap. 37.

(2) P.R.O.: H.O. 52/20, loc. cit.

(3) P.R.O.: H.O. 52/20, loc. cit. P.P.: H.C. 188 (1833) viii, pp. 42 et seq, 87, 120, 133, 184, 200 et seq, 231 et seq, 237. Cramp had been responsible for the erection of the hustings, which were placed in Cross Cheaping as they had been since 1781; there were ten compartments, one for each ward. The reform act would have permitted separate hustings in each of the ten wards and this would have made intimidation much more difficult. Cramp was unable to offer any strong reason for his failure to have ten hustings. ibid., pp. 191 et seq.

(4) ibid., pp. 11, 23, 92, 181.

> the dastardly attacks made ... by a mercenary Band of Foreign Ruffians ... brought into the City to suppress the opinion of the Electors. Why, if the Free Traders are certain of an overwhelming majority, do they attempt to prevent the Minority from recording their fruitless Opposition? Be neither deceived nor intimidated, the Cause of Order and of the Oppressed and Ruined Weaver is not lost! Hasten to the Poll - the Victory is won.(1)

It was not. Despite a lull after 3.0 p.m. on Monday when it would have been possible for Tories to vote, they were so badly beaten up that they could not be brought to the poll. Fyler and Thomas resigned by 4.0 p.m. and the poll closed a day early.(2) The final count was Bulwer 1613, Ellice 1607, Fyler 371 and Thomas 366.(3)

Within a few months there was a bye-election, following Ellice's appointment to the office of Secretary at War. This time the Home Office and R.K. Rotherham were determined to prevent trouble. Melbourne agreed to Rotherham's request that electors should be allowed to be special constables, 'without which there is no possible chance of preserving the peace at the election'.(4) In addition to 75 ordinary constables, 637 specials were recruited, including 'nearly all the respectability of each party in the city'.(5) They were paid 2s.6d. a day each and the cost of keeping the peace during the election was £200. At Rotherham's request, Lieutenant-Colonel Ewart agreed not to take the troops in the barracks as far away as Birmingham during the poll (as had been planned) but to keep them nearby at Bedworth, Kenilworth and Meriden. Five polling booths were erected in different parts of the city. The magistrates prohibited all rallies, public entries by the candidates, and tumultuous assemblies by their partisans. On the nomination day, 12 April, at least 100 constables were stationed from 7 a.m. at each polling place. Both parties responded to the pressure from the magistrates and there was far less of the treating which had

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(1) C.W.C.: Broadsides Collection, 'A Real Reformer', To the Respectable Inhabitants, the Freemen, and Electors of Coventry, 8 December 1832.

(2) P.P.: H.C. 188 (1833) viii, pp. 89, 170 et seq., 213 et seq.

(3) Fyler and Thomas petitioned but a select committee confirmed the return of Ellice and Bulwer; the sheriff was censured, however, for providing only one polling booth and for failing to keep order. Journals of the House of Commons, lxxxviii (1833), pp. 72, 265 et seq. The liberal bullies were duly paid, some at more than the agreed rate of 5s. a day but others at only 2s.6d. because, according to Randall, they had not been severe enough with the light blues. P.P.: H.C. 188 (1833) viii, pp. 129 et seq.

(4) P.R.O.: H.O. 52/23, Rotherham to Melbourne, 7 April 1833.

(5) Coventry Herald, 12 April 1833.

previously helped to keep tempers hot at elections,(1) and there was no hiring of bullies. As a result, there was hardly a drunken man; and 'none of the voters have been obstructed in going to or from the hustings and the City has been peaceable'.(2) Ellice's Tory opponent Morgan Thomas was defeated and Ellice again returned.(3)

David Buckney, a small ribbon manufacturer who was just beginning a long career in Coventry radicalism, also nominated John Morgan Cobbett, William Cobbett's son, on 8 December. J.M. Cobbett did not in fact take any part in the election, but his nomination was due to the desire of some members of the Coventry Political Union to have 'a fit person to trip up the heels of Ellice'.(4) There was great dissatisfaction with the Whig government, and with Ellice as one of its leading supporters, over the failure to carry out further radical reform and over the coercion of Ireland; 600 members of the CPU attended a meeting of protest in May 1833 and called on the King to dismiss the government.(5) Feelings were even stronger the year after, at the Whigs' transportation of the Dorset labourers. For Buckney, the most articulate and forceful radical, the punishment of the Dorset labourers was the occasion of final disillusionment with the Whigs.(6) The poverty of the working class, he told a weavers' meeting in April, which was considering recent departures from the list of prices, was due to an excess of labour. (Buckney had the ribbon trade in mind.) The Whigs might with difficulty be brought to repeal the corn laws, but they would certainly do no more, and cheap food would be no remedy while the excess of labour lasted. To remedy that, universal suffrage was needed.

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(1) P.P.: H.C. 547 (1835) viii: Report from the Select Committee on Bribery at Elections ... with the Minutes of Evidence, pp. 62 et seq.

(2) P.R.O.: H.O. 52/23, Rotherham to Melbourne, 12 April 1833.

(3) For this paragraph see Coventry Herald, 5 April, 12 April, 19 April 1833; P.R.O.: H.O. 52/23, Rotherham to Melbourne, 7 April, 12 April 1833, 14 April 1833.

(4) Coventry Herald, 12 April, 19 April 1833.

(5) ibid., 1 March, 8 March, 15 March, 10 May 1833. C.R.O.: Misc. Letters, Henry Lytton Bulwer to Hickling, 28 February 1833.

(6) For the great meeting of protest in the city at the treatment of the Dorset labourers, see Chapter Six, Section I.

If they could attain that, they should soon let the owners of property know, that though they did not take their property from them, they had found out a way of having property too ... The interest of the present government was opposed to theirs, and they must not confide power to such as at present hold it; they must have men from their own class, they must choose tailors, and cobblers, and weavers ... Competition was the great evil; and this would always continue, until they had the power of making their own laws; let them get that, and they would soon find a way of turning the magic, so as to have plenty of everything to make men happy.(1)

Buckney returned to this theme several times in the summer and autumn. Collectively, the weavers' movement rejected it and adhered to attempts to gain prohibition and the list of prices on which all weavers - Tory and radical - could agree. Even Buckney's radical colleagues among the weavers' leaders did not support him.(2) In December, Buckney, James Taylor, William Taunton and William Mayo and others decided to support a radical candidate in the forthcoming general election, William Williams, a London cotton broker and member of the Court of Common Council since 1833. He came with the blessing of William Cobbett - 'I know my man well; and I would make any sacrifice to carry him'(3) - and in his address made clear his support for household suffrage, triennial parliaments, the ballot, the abolition of sinecures, the repeal of the malt tax, the reduction of the standing army, the abolition of flogging in the armed forces, the reform of the corn laws, justice for Ireland, the disestablishment of the church and the application of tithes to public purposes

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(1) Coventry Herald, 11 April 1834.

(2) On this point, see Chapter Six, Section II. NB also his letters in the Coventry Herald advising weavers to press for radical reform. 'Don't rest contented in your present state. One of the worst mental, moral or physical conditions in which a man can exist as a member of society, is when he is not merely poor, but content in his poverty. Hence to inculcate contentment under poverty and wretchedness, is a great social crime.' 1 August 1834. The remedy was political power for the working class, 'altering the institutions of the country, by which all these matters might be amicably and beneficially arranged'; the matters in question were the surplus of labour and the reductions in the list of prices that were its local effects. 19 September 1834.

(3) C.R.O.: Misc. Letters, W. Cobbett to T. Gill, 12 December 1834. Williams was born in 1788 in Carmarthenshire. At sixteen he walked to London; by twenty-four he was earning £1000 a year in a cotton wholesaler's. Soon after, he set up business on his own account. As a common councilman he was a vehement critic of the corporation's financial extravagance. As an M.P., he constantly argued for national retrenchment. He was a close associate of Joseph Hume. See Daniel Evans, The Life and Work of William Williams (Llandyssul, 1939.)

and 'a Repeal of the Heartless Bill, which is alike a Violation of the Rights of the Poor - the Laws of God - and the Ancient Laws of England, called the Poor Law Amendment Act'. Significantly, he also wanted a return to protection for native industry against foreign imports.(1)

Ellice's address, in contrast, made no reference to any specific measures, explained that political difficulties which only somebody with close knowledge, like him, could be aware of - 'forces which all do not see, and some will not believe to exist' - had prevented him from accomplishing as much change as he would have wished, and affirmed his inferiority to none 'in a desire to see the complete purification of our social and political system from all those defects which still exist'.(2) For Buckney and his friends this was a mere mask for Whiggery; they much preferred Bulwer - stronger than Ellice on the ballot, flogging, the grievances of the dissenters and the fate of Poland - and wanted 'another candidate to be placed by the side of Bulwer to assist in the cause of Reform'.(3) Taunton and Buckney supported Williams against the advice not only of Edward Goode - always a moderate radical - but also of David Smith and George Baddeley, who warned that a third liberal candidate risked letting in Morgan Thomas, the Tory candidate. A broadside war in the liberal ranks followed.(4)

Bulwer agreed with Smith and Baddeley; he wished the three liberal candidates to arrange amicably that the one with the least chance should retire from the fight. Ellice he could not consult; he was in Europe recovering from illness and had left his canvassing

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(1) Coventry Herald, 12 December, 19 December 1834.

(2) C.W.C.: Broadsides Collection, Edward Ellice, To the Independent Electors of the City of Coventry, 11 December 1834.

(3) Coventry Herald, 5 December 1834. Bulwer had remained a supporter of the CPU in the summer of 1834: C.R.O.: Misc. Letters, Henry L. Bulwer to William Fletcher, 1 July 1834. His address called for shorter parliaments, the ballot, the reform of the corn laws and justice for the dissenters. Coventry Herald, 19 December 1834. Ellice's attitude towards the prohibitionist move of 1834 was never complained of by the radicals who proposed Williams; See Chapter Five, Section III.

(4) Coventry Herald, 5 December 1834. C.W.C.: Broadsides Collection, 'A Friend to Williams', An Exposition of Whig Sophistry, in Reply to 'Truth Told', 24 December 1834, a long analysis of Ellice's record in the Melbourne government, demonstrating his Whiggery and lack of radicalism.

to his brother, Russell Ellice. Williams refused to consider the plan. So Bulwer accepted on Boxing Day a request from the radicals of Marylebone that he should stand there, and withdrew from Coventry, appealing as he went to all Coventry liberals to work together for Ellice and Williams. 'Overlook, I beseech you, all minor differences.'(1) His withdrawal enraged Williams's supporters; they regarded it as a plot between Bulwer and Ellice to push the latter down the electors' throats.(2) When the campaign began in earnest after Christmas Williams said he regarded himself as opposed to both the other candidates and asked for plumper votes. Thomas was above all in favour of the prohibition of the import of foreign silks. Significantly, many of his supporters turned up at a radical meeting at the George Inn to announce their support of Williams because of his opposition to free trade.

Meanwhile, James Beck, the banker, pressed hard for a reunification of the liberal front - for a continuation of the spirit that had carried the reform bill. He was helped by another letter from Thomas Attwood: 'When I have censured the Whig ministers, I have always excepted Mr. Edward Ellice, because I know full well that he was by far the best among them'. The reformers of Coventry 'should forget all minor differences, in one common union for the support of liberty'.(3) Beck was successful; the efforts of the dark blue ward managers, hinted at but not detailed, were plainly crucial. Ellice and Williams were returned, the great majority of the votes for both being cast for the other. But the strength of feeling of the free trade issue was shown by 546 electors who voted for Thomas and Williams - an action which placed Williams at the head of the poll with 1,865 votes; Ellice came second with 1,601, beating Thomas by only 35. The election was once again quiet. As in 1833 pressure from themagistrates meant that there was less treating than had been usual until 1832, though it increased during the poll because of the narrow gap between Thomas and Ellice. The magistrates warned against breaches of the peace and at their request some soldiers were kept in Coventry barracks in case of need, instead of being sent away during the election; fortunately the 200

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(1) Coventry Herald, 2 January 1835.

(2) C.W.C.: Broadsides Collection, 'Fair Play', Sold! Sold! Sold!, c. 28 December 1834.

(3) Coventry Herald, 2 January 1835.

pensioners and 500 substantial householders on duty as special constables had to deal with only two cases of assault - both on constables.(1)

In the next few years the Whig-Radical alliance in the city became firmly established. Williams and Ellice differed greatly in their political principles. Ellice did not support any plans for further electoral reform and was doubtful even about the ballot. Williams - a founder member of the Metropolitan Political Union in 1831 - joined the CPU. After his election he rendered an annual account of his record in the House of Commons to his supporters, offering to resign if a majority was dissatisfied; this ceremony usually occurred at the Half Moon tavern, at which his speech (always considered satisfactory by those present) was followed by a dinner for several hundred supporters. Ellice of course refused to behave in this way. Over the chief issue of debate among Coventry radicals in the mid-1830s - the newspaper stamp duty - Williams was in favour of total abolition and presented a petition for it from a meeting where Buckney, Taunton, J.S. Whittem, Edward Goode and John Warden (a plumber and glazier newly come to the radical movement) were the chief speakers. Ellice wished a small duty to continue.(2) Yet at his annual rendering of account in 1836 Williams went out of his way to say that he differed from Ellice on minor matters only.(3) Shortly after the Coventry Liberal Registration Association was founded, to press at the annual registration court held by the revising barristers the claims to the franchise of reformers who could not be trusted to claim on their own - 'Reformers ... who looked shy at the cause they professed to espouse when their assistance was most wanted', said Edward Goode:

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(1) Coventry Herald, 12 December, 19 December, 26 December 1834, 2 January, 9 January, 16 January, 23 January 1835. Coventry Mercury, 10 January 1835. P.R.O.: H.O. 52/27, George Eld to Henry Goulburn, 31 December 1834, 2 January 1835 (and three magistrates' handbills enclosed), Lieut. Colonel Ewart to Eld, 31 December 1834. P.P.: H.C. 547 (1835) viii, pp. 66 et seq. A Correct Copy of the Poll (Coventry, 1835). The humiliation of Ellice at the poll rankled with some of his supporters; fifteen years later Benjamin Poole gave in his newspaper the details of an elaborate and incredible confidence trick alleged to have been carried out by the radicals in 1835 to induce the supporters of both Thomas and Ellice to vote for Williams: 'With Judas-like treachery they drank cups with both parties with a settled design of betrayal'. Coventry Watchman, 7 September 1850.

(2) C.R.O.: Misc. Letters, Williams to Hickling, 9 January 1836. Coventry Herald, 16 January, 2 October 1835, 6 May, 20 May 1836.

(3) Coventry Herald, 30 September 1836.

the rules of the association 'were so drawn that they could be offensive to none who agreed to be called reformers of any class'.(1)

For the 1837 election Ellice's address was briefer than ever - making reference to his respect for 'the cause of reform, the principles of civil and religious liberty, the settled institutions of our country'.(2) Williams repeated his detailed reform programme of 1835.(3) Morgan Thomas stood again in the Conservative interest and was joined by J.D.H. Hill of East Dereham, Norfolk. Their addresses stressed their support of the established church but were as vague as Ellice's.(4) A fifth candidate was John Bell, the Chartist editor of the London Mercury, who, advised by Bronterre O'Brien and Feargus O'Connor, believed that in a constituency with a great preponderance of freemen electors(5) an attempt should be made to return two radicals. He came down to Coventry 'in opposition to our wishes' complained Buckney, and 'in despite of a personal interview with the best known and longest-tried Radicals in the town', insisted on standing.(6) Kington, a local radical,

(1) ibid., 30 December 1836. William Taunton wished the association to define the principles it would support - and wished those principles to be radical ones - but 'the specific purpose of the meeting being to unite Reformers of every shade of opinion, the remarks of Mr. Taunton were considered irrelevant'. See also ibid., 23 December 1836, Coventry Standard, 30 December 1836. The Conservative Registration Association had been founded shortly before. The Liberals employed Royle as their solicitor and the Conservatives William Wilmot. Coventry Standard, 7 October 1837. Buckney still disliked the Whig alliance and wished more Coventrians agreed with him on the need for radical movement. See his letter in the Coventry Herald, 20 May 1836. 'The object of both Whigs and Tories is to increase the intellectual gloom which pervades the minds of the people in these matters, to impenetrable darkness ... When will working men understand this? When will they see through this delusion, this bubble, this cheat, this catchword of Whig and Tory? When will they act as if they felt themselves entitled to exercise their parliamentary and municipal franchises and all other rights, which as citizens, as men, they ought to posses?'

(2) Coventry Standard, 30 June 1837.

(3) loc. cit.

(4) ibid., 7 July, 21 July 1837.

(5) There were 3086 freemen and 576 £10 householders on the register for this election. Coventry Herald, 10 November 1837.

(6) See the letters of Buckney and Bell in Coventry Standard, 8 September 1837.

explained why Buckney and his colleagues opposed Bell: despite the popular nature of the Coventry electorate a radical standing by himself could command only 400 votes and coalition with the Whigs was necessary to carry one.(1) The Central Committee of the Coventry Registration Association (another name, it would seem, for the old liberal committee) with its subordinate committees in the wards, strove to ensure that the supporters of Ellice and Williams voted for the other, and that supporters of Williams did not vote for Bell. The two liberal candidates were returned.(2) The very high poll - more than 93% of the electorate - shows the strength of grassroots organisation in this popular constituency, demonstrated in respect of the liberals at least as strongly by the success of the conjunction of Ellice and Williams, which aroused the mirth of the Coventry Standard and the rage of Bell.(3) Yet the use of election bullies had disappeared by this election, though treating continued. Fearing nothing, the magistrates made no attempt to prepare specially for the election; no special constables were enrolled and the small force of a dozen regulars sufficed, though the magistrates of north Warwickshire recruited 174 specials in Nuneaton for the same election.(4) In the event, there was only one act of violence -

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(1) Coventry Standard, 25 August 1837, quoting Kington's letter in the London Mercury.

(2) 1376 freemen and 262 £10 electors voted for Ellice and Williams; the corresponding figures for Thomas and Hill were 1246 and 147. Ellice attracted 64 plumper votes from freemen and 34 from £10 householders, Williams 38 from freemen, Thomas 28 from freemen and 2 from £10 householders, Bell 5 from freemen and 2 from £10 householders. 30 freemen and one £10 man voted for Williams and Bell, and 6 freemen for Thomas and Bell. The totals of votes were Ellice 1778, Williams 1748, Thomas 1511, Hill 1393, Bell 44. 3323 voted out of the 3662 electors on the register; 94 had died before the election, and 14 had registered twice. Only 231 electors were unpolled - a mere 6½% of the electorate. Figures are calculated from A Corredt Copy of the Poll (Coventry, 1837) and Coventry Herald, 10 November 1837, which corrects the poll book at some points.

(3) The Standard printed an analysis of their voting records in the previous parliament showing that Ellice had not supported Williams in his votes for triennial parliaments, the ballot, reform of the House of Lords and the abolition of church rates without compensation. 23 June 1837. See also C.W.C.: Broadsides Collection, Anon, The Copy of a Letter received by a Gentleman in this City, 3 June 1837, a slapstick 'confession' by Ellice of his dislike of the freemen, Williams, radicalism and his visits to Coventry. Bell attacked 'our present infamous representative and commercial systems - systems the most debasing to which the spirit of shopocracy, engrafted on the spirit of aristocracy, has ever given existence' (Coventry Standard, 7 July 1837) and, equally, the 'sham radicals' of Coventry, and Williams, whose principles Bell had once approved of but who had 'proved himself a mean shuffling trimmer'. ibid., 25 August 1837.

(4) P.R.O.: H.O. 52/35, Edward Neale to the Home Office, 10 August 1837.

an unsuccessful attack on Ellice by a Tory with a clasp knife in Whitefriars Lane.(1)

The disappearance of even the threat of large-scale violence is to be explained by the fact that prohibition had ceased to be an active aim of the weaving community and thus was no longer a vital political issue - though prohibitionist sentiment lingered for years, notably in the leader columns of the Standard. With the growing prosperity of the ribbon trade from the mid-1830s onwards, prohibition no longer seemed as necessary. Above all, it was not practicable. There was a slump in the ribbon trade in the spring of 1837, but the poor law figures show that it was at least less serious than that of 1834.(2) This slump did not lead to any fresh move among the weavers to gain prohibition, since Goode was able convincingly to emphasise that the Tories under Peel were no more likely to restore prohibition than the Whigs.(3) Thus prohibition was not mentioned during the election campaign by Williams (or of course Ellice) and only in passing by Thomas and Hill. All four concentrated on national issues - the degree of political change to be desired.(4) Prohibition no longer provoked the passions or organised bullying of 1826 and 1832. Ellice's committee no longer had to use violence to win and the Tories could not have won except by the use of violence on a scale intolerable to the city at large. The constituency was becoming 'naturally' liberal: but not radical - hence the need for Williams to coalesce with Ellice and the signal failure of Bell. The Coventry electorate, popular though it was, was basically moderate - satisfied with small gains and unwilling to thrust forward grievances which, though no longer immense, were still great enough.

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(1) For the 1837 election, see Coventry Standard, 30 June, 7 July, 14 July, 21 July, 28 July, 25 August, 8 September 1837, and Coventry Herald, 21 July 1837.

(2) See Appendix I.

(3) Coventry Standard, 10 February, 17 February, 3 March, 17 March, 24 March, 21 April, 28 April, 12 May, 19 May, 26 May 1837. The Tory Stratford Dugdale had also found this out two years before. Coventry Herald, 24 April 1835.

(4) Coventry Standard, 7 July, 14 July, 21 July 1837. Coventry Herald, 21 July 1837.

II

The coming of Chartism and the election of 1841

The CPU seems to have become defunct in 1834 or 1835, after experiencing a declining membership for some time.(1) The Birmingham Political Union, with which the CPU had had close links during the reform bill crisis, withered away in 1834. In May 1837 the BPU was revived and in January 1838 the Coventry Political Union was refounded at a meeting in the County Hall attended by George Edmonds and P.H. Muntz, the leading Birmingham radicals. The six points very soon to be included in the People's Charter (published in May) were adopted as its programme. About sixty or eighty Coventry radicals attended the second meeting. They included some of the leading members of the original CPU of eight years before - William Taunton, Thomas Watson Gill, David Smith and William Mayo - others who had become active in Coventry radicalism since then - David Buckney, John Colier Farn, John Warden, James Peters, Joseph Bradley, Charles S. Eyre (the last three having been Bell's chief sponsors at the recent election) - and some men apparently new to local radical movements - H. Turner, Robert Bampton, James Rushton, Thomas Fletcher and John Robinson.(2) Mayo

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(1) See C.R.O.: Misc. Letters, H.L. Bulwer to Fletcher, 1 July 1834.

(2) Taunton was currently the toll-collector at Coventry market and from 1840 to 1843 was the proprietor of the Owenite co-operative store in the Burges and an Owenite missionary; thereafter he was an auctioneer. Gill was a hatter, Mayo a watchmaker, Charles Eyre a woolstapler and hosier, Warden a plumber, and Peters, Robinson and Buckney were ribbon manufacturers (the last a small master who had been a weaver); Farn, Fletcher, Smith and Turner were weavers. James Rushton was a newsagent in Silver Street; by 1850 he had become the manager for Charles Bray of Much Park Street. West, op. cit., pp. 771 et seq; Lascelles, op. cit., pp. 58, 63, 74. Coventry Perseverance Co-operative Society: Jubilee History (Coventry, 1917), pp. 22 et seq. Coventry Herald, 26 October 1838, 22 February 1839, Northern Star, 9 February 1839, 19 June 1841, Coventry Standard, 17 February 1843.

became the CPU's chairman and Eyre its secretary. Its task, said Buckney, was to win power for the working class from the Tories and the Whigs - 'those very men from whom we expected so much, and who have promised so much, only to deceive'. He had in mind, he said, the new poor law and the fate of the Glasgow cotton spinners and the Dorchester labourers. Lord John Russell and Daniel O'Connell 'talk of education, but when are the people to get their backs clothed and their bellies filled? You must first give them their political rights, and if they don't act well, then it will be their own faults.'(1)

At the time the CPU was refounded there was greater distress in the city than there had been for three years and there was still a good deal of June 1838.(2) Yet the Chartist movement was not really vital in Coventry in the year. Disease and deaths in the workhouse in January provoked the common Chartist phenomenon - a protest at the poor law. The first meeting was convened by Mayo, Bradley, Buckney, Warden, Smith and Taunton, and by the non-Chartist radicals Bromfield and Edward Goode. Taunton and Smith blamed the recently reduced dietary for the fatalities - but blamed the reduction not on the local directors of the poor law but on the Poor Law Commissioners whose indirect influence had been (it was alleged) exerted on them.(3) Buckney and Bradley 'addressed the meeting in a somewhat vehement style ... ascribing the New Poor Law to a bad House of Commons, and the bad House of Commons to the want of Universal Suffrage'.(4) A committee was set up to investigate the causes of the deaths and the rumours of the dishonesty and partiality of the governor of the workhouse that were spreading in the city.(5) The committee tried twice to see the directors, who at length sent word that they would confer only with a 'respectable deputation' chosen by the guardians. This increased radical

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(1) Coventry Standard, 5 January 1838. See also Coventry Herald, 26 January 1838.

(2) There were 317 casual outpoor families in January 1838 as against 276 in June 1837 and 407 in January 1835. There were 230 in June 1838. See Appendix I.

(3) This was certainly too charitable an exculpation of the directors; see Chapter Nine on this point.

(4) Coventry Herald, 2 February 1838.

(5) They originated with one of the directors of the poor, Thomas Whorrall, who told Royle, the radical solicitor, malicious stories about the conduct of the workhouse governor, John Palmer. He assaulted Whorrall and was fined 20s. The directors censured Whorrall for his rumour-mongering. ibid., 16 February, 9 March 1838.

anger at the directors: another meeting of 'universal suffrage' men followed(1), at which four men who had been recent inmates of the workhouse complained of the governor's alleged dishonesty and partiality and the attitude of the directors. Resolutions were passed censuring the directors for not admitting the deputation and criticising the dietary. The next move was the setting up of a committee of ratepayers who were not guardians to obtain information on the evils of the workhouse. But no more was heard of this.(2) In future, there was no criticism of the directors' administration of the poor law (though plenty of the commissioners); indeed local radicals spoke up for the directors - their attitude being that with all its shortcomings Coventry's poor law administration was better than the Chadwick model because it allowed outdoor relief. The energising role of the hatred of the local administration of the poor law was lacking in Coventry Chartism.(3)

Careful preparations were made for the visit of Feargus O'Connor in September. The Chartists of Foleshill, Bedworth, Nuneaton and Kenilworth were invited. A handbill entitled The Righteous Cause of Universal Suffrage enjoined: 'Englishmen arouse yourselves, or be degraded. The Grand Struggle has commenced; you must triumph or perish!' The magistrates were alarmed at the prospect of disorder and interviewed Taunton and Eyre. They denied knowing who had printed the bill. Taunton thought that its tone was too strong. They both assured the magistrates that the committee would try to keep the peace and that this would not be hard. The day began with a procession, with O'Connor at its head, from the Three Tuns by a circular route to Greyfriars Green. Bands played. A banner of green silk bore the motto 'Ireland as she ought to be';

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(1) Coventry Herald, 9 February 1838.

(2) ibid., 9 February, 23 February 1838.

(3) See Chapter Nine for a discussion of the city's poor law and local attitudes to it in this period. There was little radical activity in the city for most of 1838. In August a Chartist rally took place on Greyfriars Green. It was addressed by Buckney and Rushton and T.C. Salt, the Birmingham Chartist, on the need to support the first petition published in Birmingham in the spring. Salt said that if the petition were refused, the people could bring the government to heel by abstaining for one week from the consumption of taxed articles, making a run on savings' banks, or demanding payment of the national debt. 'Let but the people obtain what was prayed for in the National Petition and prosperity would again return, the working class would have abundance of employment, good wages, and untaxed bread.' Resolutions in favour of the five points were carried. The sixth, demanding equal electoral districts, was not mentioned. Coventry Chartists were present at the great Birmingham meeting in the same month. Coventry Herald, 10 August 1836. Coventry Standard, 18 May, 10 August, 31 August 1838.

another - 'Radical Righteousness, Whig Treachery, Tory Plunder'; a third - 'Universal Suffrage and Cheap Bread, Cheap Law, Cheap Religion, and Cheap Money'.(1)

At the meeting on Greyfriars Green Mayo was in the chair. William Taunton said that 'while two mighty factions were using the power of law and influence to oppress the people, the people were confining themselves to virtuous and moral agitation'.(2) Buckney attacked the Whigs: 'one of their first acts was to pass the Irish Coercion Bill; since then they had three times refused enquiry into the Pension List, transported the Dorchester labourers, and passed the infamous Poor Law'.(3) 'If before you have been struggling for the shadow, you are assembled this day to demand the substance. After the flattery of the one party, and the oppression of all parties the men of Coventry have at length responded to the nation's call.'(4) O'Connor praised Williams, whose votes he agreed with on most matters, but derided the 'lickspittle' Ellice - 'one of the joints of my Lord Grey's tail ... one of the worst men that ever disgraced a faction'.(5) There followed a general attack on 'illiberal constituencies ... who like the House of Lords, boasted of their hereditary rights - the old corrupt body of freemen'. Universal suffrage was the better remedy than privilege for the nation's ills.(6) The crowd present was estimated at 500 by the Standard, at between 1,500 and 2,000 by the Herald, and at between 30,000 and 40,000 by the Northern Star. 'Glory to the good working men of Coventry! They have a fine spirit, and had noble mottoes upon their banners.'(7) Even at the Herald's

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(1) Coventry Herald, 7 September 1838.
(2) Northern Star, 8 September 1838.
(3) Coventry Herald, 7 September 1838.
(4) Northern Star, loc. cit.
(5) Coventry Standard, 7 September 1838.
(6) Coventry Herald, loc. cit. O'Connor was interrupted by a freeman, whom O'Connor attacked as 'an old freeman sent to support your order. You live upon corruption, and don't want a change.' Northern Star, loc. cit.
(7) Northern Star, loc. cit., Coventry Standard, loc. cit., Coventry Herald, loc. cit. Greyfriars Green, one of the smallest pieces of common land in the city, could not accommodate more than several thousand. The Northern Star's exaggeration of the size of the meeting distressed J.C. Farn. 'From that hour we lost confidence in the man, the paper, and the movement of which he was the ostensible head. We thought that we had been imposed upon by reports from other places, as they, in return, would most likely be imposed upon by ours.' 'The Autobiography of a Living Publicist', The Reasoner, 2 December 1857, p. 283. Farn later became an Owenite missionary and ardent cooperator.

cautious estimate, this was much the largest political meeting in Coventry for many years.

The next peak of Chartist activity in the city was in the summer of 1839, after the Bull Ring riots in Birmingham, the rejection of the first petition,(1) and the agonised debate in the Convention over what the Chartists should do next to gain power. Meetings at the Three Tuns and the Red Lion denounced the actions of the police in Birmingham.(2) On Greyfriars Green Buckney urged the people

> to test the strength of their resolution by six months' abstinence from the use of exciseable articles ... if they had not the moral courage thus to refrain from assisting taxation, he very much doubted if they would have physical courage enough to exert themselves in the way some persons recommended.(3)

Taunton expressed the threats of physical force Chartism.(4) A fortnight later Taunton's theme was taken up by Dr. John Taylor, the Scottish Chartist, at another meeting on Greyfriars Green, of more than 200 persons.(5)

> They must meet bayonet to bayonet, and then they should obtain the Charter, and they would tell the people of Coventry that they were determined to have the Charter, or every field should be a field of battle, and every valley should run with blood.(6)

The Birmingham magistrates responsible for the Bull Ring troubles were 'traitors, cowards and murderers ... There is no justice

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(1) 3,600 from Coventry and district signed the first petition - 300 of them coming from Kenilworth. Coventry Standard, 1 March 1839.

(2) Coventry Herald, 19 July 1839.

(3) Coventry Standard, 26 July 1839.

(4) loc. cit. 'He would give them a simile, that was, why did the rich man put a lock on his door, a dog in his yard, and a gun over his mantelpiece? To keep away thieves - they would not come when they knew the man was prepared. The Government were the thieves. He recommended them to arm, so that if the Government thieves came, they might have a warm reception. He recommended them all to have the dog of intelligence, the bolt of firmness, and if all failed, to have recourse to the pistol as a last resort.' NB too the discussion on 'physical force' at the Bell public house, Foleshill, when John Robinson tied himself in knots arguing that arms would frighten the government - but on the other hand they would be used merely for self-defence and never to endanger the peace of the country. Coventry Standard, 24 May 1839. See also ibid., 10 May 1839, Coventry Herald, 10 May, 17 May 1839.

(5) P.R.O.: H.O. 40/50, Information and Complaint of John Royle, 10 August 1839.

(6) Coventry Standard, 9 August 1839.

in England but an Englishman's right arm ... I know I am speaking treason and sedition, but it is the truth.'(1)

The magistrates had sworn in some special constables in May and had asked (unsuccessfully) that some at least of the twenty-six soldiers in the barracks should remain in the city when Ewart was ordered to take them to Birmingham in July: but they saw no likelihood of a riot in Coventry, and made no attempt to interfere with the meetings on Greyfriars Green, believing that the advice of Taunton and Taylor would not be taken and that repression was unnecessary. In reply to the letter of concern from the Home Office after Taylor's meeting they played down its importance; and since Taylor left the city soon after the meeting they made no attempt to arrest him. Nor did they attempt to restrain Taunton, who as toll-collector of the butter market was employed by the corporation. The magistrates were sensible; there was no violence in Coventry.(2) And after the summer of 1839 until the spring of 1841 the activity of the Chartist Association was not noticeable enough to be mentioned by the magistrates or the local press - and even the Northern Star referred to it only once, mentioning its weekly meetings.(3)

The Coventry Chartists were opposed to the immediate repeal of the corn laws, which had been publicly debated in Coventry early in 1839. Charles Bray and David Smith argued for immediate repeal. A group of Chartists turned up at the meeting to oppose it. William Taunton and David Buckney put their arguments. Repeal was necessary, but it should follow the gaining of the People's Charter, since only a reformed House of Commons would reduce taxation and the standing army and abolish the national debt. Repeal while the people were still carrying these burdens would mean that farmers and manufacturers would be unable to compete with foreigners, and thus to buy Coventry's ribbons, and that the agricultural population would be driven from the countryside to aggravate the surplus of labour from which the Coventry ribbon trade was

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(1) P.R.O.: H.O. 40/50, loc. cit.

(2) P.R.O.: H.O. 40/50, Richard Marriott to Home Secretary, 15 May 1839; A. Herbert to Home Secretary, 19 July, 13 August, 14 August 1839. Coventry Standard, 9 August, 16 August 1839.

(3) Northern Star, 29 February 1840.

already suffering. Above all, they did not trust the middle-class repealers. Taunton said that 'he was certain that the present cry for cheap bread meant nothing more than cheap wages'.(1) The Chartists failed to defeat the motion for a petition to the House of Commons for immediate repeal.(2)

The Coventry branch of the Anti Corn Law Association was formed almost two years later. Its membership consisted very largely of shopkeepers, ribbon and watch manufacturers, and dissenting ministers; its president was Abraham Herbert, liberal ribbon manufacturer and mayor of Coventry; its vice-president was Charles Bray. Mayo, J.S. Whittem and Henry Merridew were also members. Working men were in the minority; they included David Smith, Edward Goode and Benjamin Poole; Poole became secretary and Smith collector of subscriptions - set at at least 2s.6d. a year. Notably, Buckney and Taunton also joined the Anti Corn Law Association.(3) By the end of 1840 these two had changed their minds on the repeal question - coming to believe that what Buckney called (in addressing a weavers' meeting) 'the fictitious value given to a commodity belonging to the wealthier class of the community'(4) ought to be striven for concurrently with the Charter. He explained his change of heart in a series of lengthy letters. He accepted the arguments of Cobden that repeal would not lower wages. Realising that the ribbon tariff would after corn law repeal confer advantages on industry not enjoyed by agriculture he argued that it would be possible to have it both ways - since the ribbon tariff merely entailed the consumer paying slightly more for a luxury article - a quite different matter from taxing food.(5) But doubts remained in his mind about the wisdom of joining the repeal movement before the Charter had been gained. He voiced them to Cobden when he came to address the Coventry association in February 1842.

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(1) Coventry Standard, 22 February 1839.

(2) loc. cit. See also ibid., 15 February 1839, and Coventry Herald, 22 February 1839. See also the report of the attack by Buckney and Taunton on the arguments of Paulton, theanti-corn law lecturer, at his meeting in Coventry, in Coventry Herald and Coventry Standard, 19 April 1839. Repeal 'would add to the misery of the working classes, by aggravating the evils of competition'.

(3) Coventry Herald, 25 December 1840, 3 September 1841, Coventry Standard, 18 December 1840, 20 August 1841, 7 January 1842.

(4) Coventry Standard, 7 August 1840.

(5) Coventry Herald, 7 May, 17 December, 24 December 1841, 18 February 1842.

> At length, Mr. Cobden said he thought it was now his turn to ask a question, and he would also beg a personal favour of the gentleman, which was, that if a deputation from Coventry was to go up to Sir Robert Peel in favour of free trade, and for a repeal of the corn laws, would he promise that he would not be one of them? (Peals of laughter from all parts of the hall) (1)

The majority of Coventry Chartists were of their original opinion, for the reasons that had moved Taunton and Buckney in 1839. Their distrust of the motives of the repealers was increased by Charles Bray's typically tactless statement in May 1841 that they were to reduce wages(2) - for which he was taken to task by other repealers in the city.(3)

Two issues were to the fore in the parliamentary election of June 1841 - the new poor law and the corn laws. Ellice and Williams worked together, at least to the extent of not attacking each other, and were opposed by the Tory Thomas Weir. All three candidates wished to preserve the protective tariff on foreign ribbons. Ellice's campaign was largely concerned with his hostility to the corn laws - said to give a far higher protection to agriculture than the tariff gave to the ribbon trade. He did not mention the new poor law, which he had voted for. Williams largely repeated his detailed programme of radical reform of 1837 - in which hostility to the corn laws and the harsh features of the new poor law bulked large. Weir was at one with Williams on the new poor law - condemned by Weir as a Whig measure. He disagreed with Ellice and Williams on agricultural protection. Though in favour of some adjustment of the corn laws to prevent very high prices, he argued that the repealers wanted to be able to lower wages and that the ribbon trade would benefit most from a prosperous agricultural community able to buy its products. He also made great play with his support for freemen's rights, and his desires to get smuggling made a penal offence, and taxation reduced to relieve the middle and working classes.(4)

Weir made a strong appeal to the White Horse Operative Conservative Association. After some years devoted more to

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(1) Coventry Herald, 4 February 1842.

(2) Coventry Standard, 14 May 1841. Bray said that 'it might be stated their object in having the restrictions taken off the necessaries of life was to give less wages to the operatives. He admitted that was the case.'

(3) ibid., 4 June 1841.

(4) Coventry Standard and Coventry Herald, 18 June, 25 June, 2 July 1841.

convivial dinners than active political work, they took a more positive role in the spring and summer of 1841.(1) They were encouraged towards this by the success of the Tories of Nottingham, who elected John Walter, the editor of The Times and a strong opponent of the new poor law, at a bye-election in the spring. In an address of congratulation the White Horse Operative Conservatives attacked the 'abominable and unnatural poor law' and went on to 'regret that, although Coventry and its vicinity have been subjected to such unprecedented misery and privation, which are mainly attributable to the inadequate protection afforded us by this French-loving, poor-starving, un-English Government, there are yet some of the working classes so short-sighted ... that they yet continue to support (Edward Ellice) to represent Coventry'.(2) 300 met at the White Horse during the election campaign. The weavers Peter Gregory(3), Angliss, Parker, Pritchard and Thomas

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(1) The White Horse Operative Conservative Association was founded early in 1834. Annual dinners were held which several hundred attended; patriotic songs, and toasts to the royal family, the Anglican Church and its ministers, the Duke of Wellington and the army and the immortal memory of Nelson were usual. Charles Woodcock and, more often, William Wilmot, were guests - the latter praised for his support of freemen's rights, which White Horse Operative Conservatives were eager to defend. There were several similar but smaller associations attached to public houses in the city. Coventry Standard, 6 January, 24 February 1837, 3 January, 25 September 1840, 8 January, 23 July 1841. Thomas Paine the Well Street weaver expressed in letters to the Standard all the attitudes of the White Horse Operatives Conservative Association at their most extreme: hatred of the new poor law, free trade, papists, dissenters, radicals, steam factories and those who infringed the rights of the freemen of Coventry - forces which he tended to regard as leagued in a conspiracy. Paine was a working-class analogue of William Wilmot, though his professed hero was Richard Oastler, and his motto 'The Throne, the Cottage and the Altar'. 'And is it not a fact that Cobden and others of the League faction are owners and proprietors of the bastille factories which make men, women and children slaves? ... Let us study to support our own country - our own trades - by right divine, by legal right, by moral right, and by natural right.' ibid., 23 January 1846. Two years later Paine wrote that 'the steam-power and factory system is pauperising the greater part of the weavers to enable manufacturers to compete with the destructive workings of this delusive system - Free Trade'. ibid., 11 February 1848. NB too his comment on Peel's fall in 1846: 'It is for the reflective mind to rejoice that the Judas pilot has wrecked himself, and that the good ship English constitution ... will be able to distinguish those false friends, hypocritical commanders and traitors who have posted her amidst the breakers of Free Trade, Catholic Relief Bill and Irish Repeal'. 10 July 1846. His letters in ibid., 19 March, 13 August 1841, 28 January 1842, have the same tone.

(2) Coventry Standard, 21 May 1841.

(3) Perhaps the Peter Gregory who had been a weavers' leader a decade before.

Paine anathematised the new poor law - which meant that the poor ended their days 'within the circumscribed limits of a bastille wall' - the folly of corn law repeal, since a protective duty benefited both the urban and the rural poor, the evil of 'free trade' in ribbons, which had led to such misery, ribbon smugglers for whom transportation should be the punishment, and those who menaced the constitution in church and state - Chartists especially. Charles Lilly and Peter Moore, said Gregory, (an old supporter of the dark blues) would never have supported such men. When Ellice tried to speak from the balcony of the Craven Arms during the election the operative conservatives turned up in force, and drowned his words with cries of 'No bastille, Neddy', 'No poor law', and 'No black bread budget'. Ellice gave up after half an hour.(1)

Ellice and his party were as unpopular with some Chartists in the city as they were with the White Horse Conservatives. The council of the local branch of the National Charter Association denounced Whig iniquities since the 'humbug' of the Reform Bill. 'Who has degraded us, robbed us, transported us, treated our petitions with scorn, and our complaints with contempt? The Whigs.'(2) The New Poor Law was bitterly attacked: as was the Whigs' new 'humbug cry' - cheap bread. 'They have unhesitatingly declared, that their sole aim and objects are to lower the price of goods, which can be done by no other means than lowering wages ... Down! Down!! Down!!! with the Base, Brutal and Bloody Whigs.'(3) Some Chartists voted for Weir. Ellice's comment on the contest was that 'the Chartists plump the Tory'; he distinguished them from the 'Rads' who voted for Williams.(4)

Yet at the poll Ellice and Williams beat Weir by a very wide

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(1) Coventry Standard, 25 June 1841.

(2) Bodleian Library: Gough Add. Warwickshire b.3, The Coventry Branch of the National Charter Association to the Electors and Non-Electors of the City of Coventry, 28 June 1841.

(3) ibid., The Council of the National Charter Association to the Electors and Non-Electors of the City of Coventry, 28 June 1841. See also the comments of the Northern Star, 26 June, 3 July 1841, on the election: Ellice was disparaged as the 'Poor Law Whig member', and Williams as a 'Whig.'

(4) National Library of Scotland: Ellice Papers, E63/205, Edward Ellice sen. to Edward Ellice jun., 24 June 1841. NB that Weir made a bid for Chartist support by calling for the release of Chartist political prisoners. Coventry Herald, 2 July 1841.

margin, most of their respective supporters voting for the other.(1) The figures show the lack of appeal for most of the electorate of agricultural protection and attacks on the new poor law; this latter issue might have tended to divide Ellice and Williams and give the victory to Williams and Weir, but Coventry did not suffer from the extreme rigours of the new poor law which was thus not a pressing local grievance. The question that most strongly bound Ellice and Williams together - corn law repeal - attracted most electors strongly and thus helped to cement the liberal alliance once more:(2) though credit should also be given here to the power of the liberal ward managers to preserve unity against the strain of differences between Ellice and Williams apparent for years.(3) And once again the lack of organised violence suggests that on both sides a liberal victory had been foreseen.(4)

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(1) The declaration was Williams 1870, Ellice 1829, Weir 1290. The poll book gives on analysis slightly lower figures: 1824, 1759 and 1201 respectively, of which 1610 were given for Ellice and Williams, 29 for Ellice and Weir, and 105 for Williams and Weir; there were also 1067 plumpers for Weir, 120 for Ellice, and 109 for Williams. A Correct Copy from the Sheriff's Books of the Poll ... 1841 (Coventry, 1841).

(2) 5,600 adult males in Coventry, 700 in Foleshill, and 200 from Stoke, signed the repeal petition of May 1841. Coventry Herald, 21 May 1841.

(3) Coventry Standard, 2 July 1841. At his annual meeting of report to his constituents in 1838 Williams said he disagreed with Ellice on many questions 'yet it was impossible to please all parties' and refused requests from radicals 'to tell us about Ellice'. ibid., 28 December 1838. At Williams's dinner one year later Edward Goode bitterly complained that Williams's supporters had toasted Ellice only 'three times three' instead of 'nine times nine' and pleaded that 'unless they were united they should never be able to overcome the never-tiring, undying, tyrannical, vexatious Tory faction'. ibid., 29 December 1839. Ellice disliked Williams personally: he was stingy and refused to pay any of the expenses of the 1841 election. This made it 'difficult to get my people to split with him'. Ellice Papers, loc. cit.

(4) The only incidents were some 'Jeffreys and Barlowing' and some quickly repaired damage to the hustings caused by the press of electors in front; there were no injuries. Coventry Standard, and Coventry Herald, 2 July 1841.

III

Chartism: peak and decline, 1842-1848

In 1839 and much of 1840 there had been a good deal of work for weavers, and at list prices in the plain trade: despite the current drop in real wages, these were years of comparative prosperity. This no doubt helps to explain the lack of Chartist activity in these years. From the autumn of 1840 to the spring of 1843 there was a slump in the ribbon trade, and for the first two years of the period the list of prices was abandoned.(1) There was renewed vitality in the Chartist movement in the city: though, significantly, it was still uninfluential in the general election of 1841. In this new phase most of the handful of shopkeepers and manufacturers who had taken such a prominent part in the work of the CPU in 1838 - Gill, Eyre, Rushton, Robinson, James Peters, Warden, Mayo - were no longer active in the movement. Only Buckney from this group remained.(2) The men who came to the fore in 1841 were all working men: Rattray and Peter Hoy were silk printers, John Eaves, David Haynes, William Sisserson, Joseph Peters, Richard Hartopp and William Hewins were all weavers, Samuel Knight a watchmaker.(3)

This shift in the class balance of the movement is no doubt to be partly explained by the distrust of the middle classes shown by many Coventry Chartists in their continued hostility to the

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(1) See Chapter Five, Sections III and IV, and Chapter Six, Section II.

(2) Taunton remained an active Chartist too, but he was merely the toll-collector in the market.

(3) Northern Star, 19 June 1841.

immediate repeal of the corn laws. The renewed activity began in the spring of 1841, with the setting up in Coventry, Rugby, Nuneaton and Kenilworth of branches of the National Charter Association; Knight became secretary, and Buckney treasurer, of the Coventry branch. The branches joined together to provide a salary for a Chartist lecturer, William Martin. Thereafter he gave regular weekly addresses to each of the five branches. He was succeeded in the summer by John Mason, the Newcastle shoemaker who had been recently active in Leicester, and who instructed Coventry Chartists on the folly of trusting to middle-class promises. A 'numerous' meeting heard George White lecture in August. Two more visitors - Peter McDouall and R.K. Philp - lectured in September; 120 turned up,(1) and in November McDouall returned 'owing to the proceedings of the corn law gentry in this town' to counter the repealers. The meeting resolved 'that it was impolitic to agitate for anything short of the People's Charter'.(2) Bronterre O'Brien came soon after; the Chartist room at the George Inn was too small to take the audience and a larger room belonging to the Owenite Socialists had to be borrowed. 'A forest of blistered hands' were raised to thank him for his lecture, devoted largely to the incompatibility of middle class and working class interests.(3) There were 120 at the Chartist festival and ball on New Year's Eve.(4)

At the end of the year the Chartists made their first irruption into the public life of the city for over two years. The slump in the ribbon trade was causing distress in Coventry which the Rev. W. Drake of St. John's described as worse than anything he had ever seen, even in London. The mayor convened a meeting in the County Hall to raise the usual subscription. As always, this was intended to be a gathering of gentlemen who suppressed their political differences for charitable purposes. This time, however, the Chartists turned up in some strength, led by Buckney and Taunton. The meeting was due to start at noon. By 12.15 the mayor had not arrived. News came that he was ill, and Taunton proposed as chairman

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(1) Northern Star, 17 April, 24 April, 14 August, 2 October, 9 October 1841. See also P.R.O.: H.O. 45/52, Thomas Burgess to S.M. Phillips, 1 February and 1 May 1841.

(2) Northern Star, 13 November 1841.

(3) ibid., 4 December 1841.

(4) ibid., 8 January 1842.

John Gordon, the Unitarian minister sympathetic to the Chartist cause. The Rev. John Howells of Holy Trinity and John Gulson, the Quaker gentleman, immediately proposed E.H. Woodcock, the Anglican and Tory banker. Gordon withdrew. Then as the meeting proceeded to discuss the raising of money to buy bread for the relief of distress, Buckney and Taunton moved 'that it was the opinion of this meeting that the distress was attributable to the partial and unjust laws arising from the system of class legislation and the absence of salutary regulations between employers and their workmen'.(1) Woodcock refused to put the resolution. Concerted uproar from the Chartists present followed. At length Woodcock put to the meeting the question of whether Buckney's motion should be put. It was carried. The respectable then left, met elsewhere, and chose for the committee to collect and dispense relief subscriptions men ranging from Charles Bray on the left to E.H. Woodcock on the right - but no Chartists. Meanwhile, the Chartist rump left behind in County Hall discussed Buckney's motion. Gordon and Richard Hands pointed out that the intrusion of Chartist ideas into such a meeting was likely to diminish the generosity of the city's inhabitants towards the relief fund. Buckney withdrew his motion.(2)

The Coventry Chartists continued to be split, into the minority who favoured concurrent attempts to gain the Charter and corn law repeal, and those who put the Charter first. When Buckney, despite his doubts, attended the Anti Corn Law Association's tea party for Cobden in February, the Chartists met at the same time in their room at the George in opposition to 'the broad cloth gentry ... the corn law humbugs of the town' and were addressed by Peter Hoy for an hour.(3) The opportunity for a more public demonstration of Chartist ideas came a few weeks later, when the Anti Corn Law Association announced a meeting in St. Mary's Hall to petition for repeal. A handbill entitled Justice to one and all called upon members of the National Charter Association to attend the meeting 'and pursue such a course of policy on that occasion as would become

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(1) Coventry Standard, 31 December 1841.

(2) Coventry Standard, 31 December 1841, 7 January 1842. Coventry Herald, 31 December 1841. See also Buckney's letter in the Standard, 31 December 1841: 'We considered that the distress which now exists differs materially from the distress which has existed at former periods; it is not confined to any locality, but is co-extensive with the queendom itself; continuous in its duration; and cannot be adequately relieved by private benevolence'.

(3) ibid., 5 February 1842. Coventry Herald, 4 February 1842.

the character of Englishmen, as patriots for their country, as lovers of their homes, and as ardent friends of pure and just government'.(1)

The leaders of the Anti Corn Law Association read this as an appeal to disrupt the meeting, and attempted at a series of last-minute conferences throughout the night before the meeting to agree with the NCA on a formula that would please both repealers and Chartists: but as a result the Whigs among the repealers refused to attend the meeting at all. St. Mary's Hall filled five minutes after it was opened. As the chairman, James Sibley Whittem was speaking, John Mason (the local Chartist lecturer) entered with several members of the NCA local committee; they were cheered by the Chartists present. Buckney and Taunton were key men in the attempt at a united front, as members of both the NCA and the ACLA. Buckney and David Smith moved for total repeal as a means of alleviating the poverty then being suffered by weavers. Before the vote on this, Taunton and Joseph Cash (the Quaker ribbon master and ardent repealer) moved the second resolution - that what was also needed was 'a full, entire and complete representation of the people in the House of Commons'. This did not satisfy Chartists present. Peter Hoy said that the ACLA had promised the night before that if the Chartists did not oppose the repeal resolution the Six Points would be embodied in the petition. He accused Buckney and Taunton of breaking their word in bringing forward a much less specific resolution: 'What did you say to me in Little Park Street last night, David?'(2) 'Mr. Mason then spoke for more than an hour in one continual strain of thrilling eloquence, showing the superiority of the Charter agitation over all others.'(3) Buckney and Taunton reproached their Chartist friends with interruption. Charles Bray put forward a detailed plan for representative reform which he called a compromise between the wishes of the Chartists and repealers present: the franchise for all men over 21 who were not paupers, to be exercised in the choice of a list from which M.P.s would then be selected, again by universal suffrage but with weighting for 'intelligence'. 'I am for universal suffrage. (Cheers) Stop, stop, allow me to qualify myself; I would have it so guarded that the masses should not have the preponderance, lest it

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(1) Northern Star, 26 February 1842.

(2) Coventry Standard, 18 February 1842.

(3) Northern Star, 26 February 1842.

should be to the discouragement of the distributive or middle class. (Oh! Oh!)'(1) After much argument the Chartists allowed the resolution for repeal to pass when the Taunton-Cash resolution, interpreted as calling for universal suffrage, was carried and when Whittem agreed to lead a deputation to the mayor to get the use of St. Mary's Hall, to discuss the remaining five points.(2)

This second meeting lasted from 8.0 p.m. until 1.30 a.m. All save a dozen or so of the 300 present were Chartists. Taunton said that 'the reason why the middle classes do not join the Chartists is because of the blood and thunder doled out to them'.(3) There was uproar when he called Dr. Taylor a spy and the cause of John Frost's transportation. He was reminded that he had advocated physical force as much as Taylor. 'The reason (he replied) he recommended arming at that period was to work on the fears of the people, but seeing that they gained nothing by it, his opinion was now altered; and to show that no good came of violence, he instanced the French Revolution of 1789.'(4) Edward Goode cut across this debate by arguing that there should be a property qualification, that the country could not afford to pay M.P.s, and that the resolution for a vote on all five points together was contrary to the terms (to discuss the Charter) on which the meeting had been agreed. He criticised the Chartists of Nottingham for allying with the Tories to return John Walter, and attacked the Coventry Chartists too.

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(1) Coventry Standard, 18 February 1842. See also Bray's letter on the subject in Coventry Herald, 25 February 1842: in which he argued for the suffrage for all over 25, with weighting and a bicameral parliament. 'Votes should not go entirely, which would be a kind of physical force.'

(2) Coventry Standard and Coventry Herald, 18 February 1842. Northern Star, 26 February 1842. A few weeks later, Edward Goode and John Warden led a deputation of Coventry repealers to found a branch of the Anti Corn Law Association in Bedworth. Coventry Chartists came too. Goode appealed for an alliance of all radicals, with repeal as its programme, to undermine the aristocracy by achieving it: 'he did not believe it was the design of the Almighty that one man should roll in luxuries and feed his dogs with wholesome meat, and the thousands who labour to produce those luxuries should starve for bread in the midst of plenty'. Rattray agreed: 'he could not be content to starve because he was not enfranchised, and he was not aware of anything more likely to obtain the Charter than the pulling down the power of the aristocracy by pulling down the Corn Laws'. But he was interrupted with cries of 'The Charter' throughout; Joseph Peters, Richard Hartopp and David Shaw (a Nuneaton weaver) argued that the proposed union of the middle and working classes would lead merely to the betrayal of the latter by the former after repeal and before the Charter. The Charter should be striven for first. Coventry Herald, 4 March 1842.

(3) Coventry Standard, 11 March 1842.

(4) loc. cit.

> He never attended a meeting of that body but they always insinuated that they were the most virtuous people (Hisses and uproar) ... Goode compared them to a man who borrowed his friend's horse to go as far as Derby, when he wanted to go to York: and as soon as he got the horse, instead of only going to Derby, riding it to York, which was not the way to get St. Mary's Hall again. (Uproar) (1)

Goode moved that the five points should be put seriatim to allow separate consideration of them. Only seven voted for it: they included John Warden and John Gordon, who in a speech lasting one hour lambasted the lack of a united programme among the Chartists. He in turn was attacked by John Starkey (a nonconformist lay preacher) who criticised nonconformist ministers who supported the repeal of the corn laws, for selfish class reasons.(2) The meeting broke up in some confusion.(3)

The plan of the Complete Suffrage Association in the spring of 1842 - to attempt to forge an alliance of the middle and working classes for both repeal and radical political reform - had its supporters in Coventry. Sibley Whittem and Taunton founded the Coventry branch of the CSA and Whittem and Jacob Bright Browett (the son of William Browett, the Quaker draper) wrote to the head-quarters of the Anti Corn Law League urging that at the forthcoming

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(1) loc. cit.

(2) loc. cit. Starkey said: 'We mean to carry out the principle that no Christian minister shall have two coats, two hats, or two pairs of shoes. If any poor brother stands in need of one he shall give it to him. There should be an equality: those having lands should sell them; the Queen should have only one horse instead of twenty-nine; Prince Albert was to be curtailed; all those who had hounds or horses were not to be allowed to keep them; they were to divide the good things.'

(3) loc. cit. See also Coventry Herald, 11 March, 18 March 1842. Gordon lived in Cheylesmore manor house, a very substantial dwelling. Gordon's father had been a Scottish Methodist schoolmaster who had moved to Dudley, where Gordon was born in 1807. After an education at Dudley Grammar School Gordon had planned to become an Anglican clergyman but had been denied entry to Queen's College Oxford because he would not subscribe to the Thirty-Nine Articles. He studied at home under his father to become a Wesleyan minister, preached his first sermon at eighteen, and was expelled from the Wesleyan ministry at twenty-seven for criticising the powers of Conference. He then became a Unitarian: Gordon wrote much on religious and educational matters, contributing to Aspland's Christian Reformer, and James Martineau's Prospective Review; he also helped Martineau with his hymn book. J.R. Stephens, with whom Gordon corresponded during his imprisonment in Chester Castle, was a close friend. The biography of JRS in DNB is by Gordon's son. Gordon was at Coventry from 1841 to 1855, where he was a noted controversialist: 'he bore himself too much as a strong man rejoicing in his strength ... his nature was free and gushing, spurning rules and restraints'. Funeral Address by the Rev. Charles Beard ... in memory of the Rev. John Gordon (Coventry, 1880), pp. 8 et seq, 20. See also, H. McLachlan, Alexander Gordon (Manchester 1932), pp. 1 et seq.

London conference of the league members should declare their willingness to take up the cause of radical reform. Taunton seems to have argued the same way at the conference. But meanwhile one group of Coventry Chartists were shifting their ground even further away from an alliance of the working and middle classes as some repealers were moving towards it. Two talks (intended for Coventry women) by R.R.R. Moore, the Anti Corn Law League lecturer, were interrupted by Chartists led by Peter Hoy, who argued that distress was caused not by the corn laws but by the spread of labour-displacing machinery - a reflection, this, of the growth of the steam factory in Coventry.(1)

The question was debated once again in July, at a meeting at County Hall that lasted six hours and fifty-five minutes. The notion that the current distress was caused by the corn laws and class legislation, and that what was needed was a combined effort for repeal and radical political reform to end the power of the landed aristocracy was put forward by Taunton, Buckney, Joseph Cash, Thomas Bromfield (a watch manufacturer), John Watts, minister of Cow Lane Particular Baptist Chapel, and Jacob Bright Browett. Taunton, referring to Hoy and his friends, was sorry to see that Luddism was abroad; machinery was not the cause of distress. Buckney deprecated talk of a necessary antagonism between middle-class and working-class men of like mind. He did not know which class he belonged to: he had been a weaver and though 'he was a manufacturer, a sort of go-between now ... he was with the working men as one of them'.(2) Gordon said the middle class were not tyrants. George White, the Birmingham Chartist, was nearer the

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(1) Coventry Standard, 8 April 1842. Coventry Herald, 1 April, 8 April, 15 July 1842. Whittem's letter (of 14 July 1842) is given in Coventry Herald, 22 July 1842: 'Do urge upon the League the propriety and policy of leading the people. We want but leaders, and we will do anything and everything, but the masses will not restrict their efforts to Corn Law Repeal. Our language will be denunciation of aristocracy and class legislation, and defiance of the present House of Commons ... Above all, impress upon the delegates that if they want the people at their back they must take up the Suffrage question. Without that, their efforts are hopeless, and the people will throw themselves upon more daring and reckless leaders.' NB too J.B. Browett's letter (loc. cit.): 'The universal cry is, what is to be done next? ... Why do not the League at once declare their belief in the utter hopelessness of obtaining justice from the aristocracy, and their determination to assist with all their power in agitating the Complete Suffrage question? ... The Commons House must be made democratic ... the aristocracy are drawing upon themselves the vengeance of injured millions. Let them beware in time, ere it be too late.'

(2) Coventry Standard, 22 July 1842.

mood of most present. He asked them not to be

> gulled by gentlemen in fine cloth coats and spectacles ... One man, who was a member of the league and a poor-law guardian, on the hustings would shout for cheap bread and a big loaf, but afterwards he would go down to the Bastille and say they should live on five ounces of bread; they would make the loaf cheap enough, but take care at the same time that the poor should have but very little ... Cobden, who has made his riches out of the poor in Manchester, how are his men off - starving in cells - in filthy cells. You have heard the landed aristocracy abused, but they were never so mean as these political humbugs - these Malthusians, who scientifically analyse the contents of a man's stomach to see how much he can live on ... What was the cry of these free traders - these Corn Law repealers? The extension of trade and commerce. How would they extend it - not for the benefit of the poor. They had machinery lying idle; if trade was extended to ten times the amount, they would still extend their machinery. The working class ... would be as miserable as they are now; how had the trade in ribbons been extended; had they not reduced their wages every time? (Cries of 'Yes') He said England was capable of producing three times as much as could be consumed ('No' from Mr. Buckney). (1)

The Chartists present rejected the 'Sturgeite movement' decisively, defeating the main motion by a large majority and carrying instead one that called on the Queen to implement the Charter immediately and 'thus enable people to repeal all bad laws, and establish peace, comfort and happiness throughout the land'. The meeting ended with three cheers for the Charter and Feargus O'Connor.(2)

The tone of Chartist rhetoric was sharpening. Throughout the spring and summer of 1842 Chartist activity and membership was growing in Coventry - stimulated by the continuing distress in the ribbon trade and the national excitement for the Chartist cause in the year of great depression and the second petition. Chartist activity reached its peak in August (as everywhere) but even then the movement was consistently peaceful: significantly, the dispute over the list of prices in the ribbon trade had been settled in May and there was in the summer no large quarrel between masters and men in the city to raise the temperature.(3) Forty-five new members of the Coventry branch of the NCA were enrolled in one week in May

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(1) loc. cit. NB also the speech of Peter Hoy, loc. cit: 'his opinion of the Sturgeite movement was this - to get the working classes of the country to come with them, they would tack the Charter to the tail; the Corn Law repeal was to be the head, and the Chartist movement the tail. When they had agitated, the repealers expected the honourable house would allow the head to come in, but as soon as the corn law was in, the tail would be lopped off. (Cheers)'

(2) Coventry Standard and Coventry Herald, 22 July 1842.

(3) On this crucial wage dispute, see Chapter Six, Section II.

after the rejection of the second petition, and eighty more in one week in July.(1) By the beginning of August the Coventry branch was meeting three times a week; there was also a discussion class on Thursdays and a meeting of the Chartist Harmonic Society on Saturdays.(2) Buckney, Rattray, Peter Hoy, Thomas Maclean the Coventry weavers' leader, and Bairstow the Leicester Chartist, lectured to large audiences. John Starkey talked on the effects of priestcraft on the moral, intellectual and physical condition of the working-class, and on another occasion on the possibilities of working-class settlement on the land.(3)

On 12 August the striking miners of South Staffordshire were joined by the Bedworth miners, who demanded 3s.6d. for a nine-hour shift and an end to truck. Starkey, Richard Holmes (a Bedworth weaver and Chartist), an unnamed weaver from Coventry, and Arthur O'Neill, the Glasgow Chartist lecturer, urged the miners to stand firm. The north Warwickshire magistrates strove to detach the miners from the Chartists - refusing to let Holmes attend a meeting of miners and masters - and to settle the dispute by paternalist intervention; C.N. Newdegate, Lord Aylesford, Lord Lifford and George Whieldon (the mineowner) met a miners' deputation at the Wagon Overthrown and promised to look into the dispute. At the same time, Aylesford ordered two troops of the Warwickshire Yeomanry to assemble at Bedworth.(4)

On 17 August 250 Bedworth miners walked down the Foleshill Road to Coventry, apparently at the invitation of the local Chartists. Taunton and Holmes addressed them on Greyfriars Green, asked them not to parade because of the fears of the magistrates and to go to Stivichall Grove, away from the city, to wait for an evening meeting on Greyfriars Green that Taunton convened by quickly distributed handbill - Come and hear the truth. As bread, cheese and beer were being distributed to the Bedworth miners, the city magistrates met hurriedly, issued a handbill asking the inhabitants to assist in

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(1) In the summer branches were also begun in Bulkington, Kenilworth and Foleshill.

(2) Another indication of the popularity of music among Coventry Chartists was their Easter Monday concert, when excerpts were performed from the operas Wat Tyler and William Tell. Northern Star, 9 April 1842.

(3) Northern Star, 14 May, 11 June, 18 June, 25 June, 2 July, 30 July, 6 August, 20 August, 1842.

(4) P.R.O.: H.O. 45/261A, Aylesford to Sir James Graham, 15 August, 16 August, 17 August 1842. Coventry Standard and Coventry Herald, 19 August 1842.

stopping any breaches of the peace, recruited special constables, and agreed that five magistrates should be on constant duty. Some members of the yeomanry were brought into the city. At the evening meeting on Greyfriars Green 6,000 were present.(1) Rattray and Holmes explained the miners' case, and urged them to hold out. William Taunton urged everybody to keep the peace and not to hiss at the thirty yeomanry troopers in the city - they could not help their job. Joseph Squiers and George Hemming(2) argued that parading the streets to collect subscriptions for the miners was not advisable and so Peter Hoy arranged for a committee to collect discreetly. By 11.0 p.m. the peaceful meeting had broken up.(3)

By the beginning of the following week the continuing strike among the colliers was accompanied by a dispute among the silk chiné printers of Coventry employed by Richard Hands. He paid his men 18s. a week, and offered them an increase to 25s. in August, but on condition that they met a larger work-norm with penalties for non-fulfilment. His men regarded this offer as an attempt to reduce their earnings, and refused to accept. Hands sacked them. Feeling was exacerbated by Hands' replacing them with labour from Manchester, at the rate offered to the Coventry men. The prospect of a conjunction between the two groups of workers alarmed the magistrates of the county and the city. They conferred, and acted together. 130 specials were sworn in at Nuneaton, and they with 22 men from the Third Dragoon Guards and the Warwickshire Yeomanry, and the regular constables of the rural police of Knightlow hundred, dispersed several colliers' meetings in north Warwickshire; the Riot Act was read at one. The county magistrates were particularly worried lest the Coventry men moved into the county, and feared that their specials might not be able to cope. The Coventry magistrates were worried lest the colliers moved into the city. 160 additional specials were recruited in the city - bringing the number supplementing the 17 regular constables to 255. One man asked to become a special was William Taunton, who refused on the

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(1) The estimate of the Coventry Standard; the figure given in the Northern Star was 10,000. Northern Star, 27 August 1842.

(2) Squiers was the Owenite schoolmaster of Thomas Street Infant School, a friend of Charles Bray and secretary of the Labourers and Artizans' Friend Society. Coventry Perseverance Co-operative Society, Jubilee History (Coventry, 1917), p. 29. Hemming was a confectioner and lozenge-maker of Butcher Row who with his son Feargus O'Connor Hemming was soon to acquire a plot at the Chartist land colony at Great Dodford, Worcs: Local and Personal Acts 14 and 15 Vict. cap. 139, Second Schedule. White, op. cit., p. 553.

(3) P.R.O.: H.O. 45/261A, W. Hawkes to Sir James Graham, 17 August 1842 (and handbill enclosed), Lord Aylesford to Graham, 18 August, 19 August 1842. Coventry Standard and Coventry Herald, 19 August 1842. Northern Star, 27 August 1842.

grounds that it would be improper of him to address public meetings if he accepted. The magistrates soon after banned the meeting of chiné printers and colliers planned to occur on Greyfriars Green on 22 August. Unable therefore to speak, Taunton then accepted the request and became a special constable.(1)

Despite the ban, some chiné printers met at Greyfriars Green on 22 August. No colliers were there, they having been stopped from coming, apparently, by the Warwickshire magistrates. Before the speeches began, E.H. Woodcock, R.K. Rotherham and Dr. Arrowsmith (2) arrived with some specials and asked them to leave. They went immediately, and without fuss, to Stivichall Common, near the Six Closes, outside the city boundary. 600 or 700 were present - most of them not chiné printers. Three chiné printers who were also members of the NCA addressed the crowd. Mahon attacked the Anti-Corn Law Leaguers and asked why they did not protest against reductions of wages as well as the high price of bread. Stoddart saw working class unity as the only remedy:

> No good would ever be achieved by the working classes till they united; unless they were to unite reduction would follow reduction till they were reduced to a union workhouse. He would rather go through a gaol to the scaffold than go through a workhouse to his grave. He did not come there to excite any man ... (but) they would never do any good until they were united as one man.(3)

Rattray deprecated such talk. Hands had behaved unfairly. The entire middle class could not be for that reason indicted.

> The wealth producers, or the working classes, were not the only meritorious individuals in society; they were working men from necessity, not from choice. There was a deal of credit due to the man who, by his industry, ingeniousness, and economy raised himself from the lower ranks to the higher classes of society. He stated this much because he found the delusion was gaining ground, that virtue alone resided with the working classes.(4)

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(1) Coventry Standard and Coventry Herald, 26 August 1842. Northern Star, 27 August 1842. P.R.O.: H.O. 45/261A, C.H. Bracebridge to Graham, 20 August 1842, Aylesford to Graham, 20 August, 22 August, 25 August 1842, W. Hawkes to Graham, 22 August 1842, declaration of W. Hawkes, 22 August 1842, Peter Gregory to Graham, 22 August 1842. This Gregory was the White Horse Operative Conservative. Cf. the magistrates' attitude to this meeting and their support of the weavers a few months earlier: Chapter Six, Section II.

(2) Dr. Arrowsmith was in fact guilty of the only act of violence recorded for these troubled weeks: he discovered Smith, an apothecary, treating one of his patients and threw the medicine onto the bed. Smith laid an information against him and then withdrew it. Arrowsmith some weeks later attacked Smith's solicitor Lea with a walking stick in the Coventry Subscription Library in Hertford Street. Arrowsmith was fined £5 at Coventry Assizes after apologising. Coventry Standard, 20 January, 4 August 1843.

(3) Coventry Standard, 26 August 1842.

(4) loc. cit.

The meeting dispersed without incident. The chiné printers' dispute with Hands seems to have been settled with their re-engagement. The colliers drifted back to work - settling apparently for the mineowners' offer to end truck, but with no advance in the current rate of 3s. and a quart of beer for a 12 hour shift.(1) The yeomanry stood down. By the end of the month all was quiet; the exhausted mayor of Coventry went away for a month's holiday and all the city magistrates had to worry about was a series of three lectures on the causes of the distress by J.C. Farn, the Owenite missionary, now of Scotland, late of Coventry.(2)

Chartist activity in Coventry never again reached the peak achieved in August 1842. But while the slump in the ribbon trade lasted, until the spring of 1843, meetings were frequent and apparently well attended. The local branch of the National Charter Association was active enough to hire new rooms in Well Street in the autumn - the Chartist Hall.(3) In the autumn of 1842 Rattray became an active agent of the Anti Corn Law League in Coventry, canvassing the city and lecturing on the need for repeal. At one lecture he was questioned by Starkey and answered so unsatisfactorily that Hoy gave a lecture on the subject at the Chartist room: speaking 'in a masterly way, completely clearing away the rubbish of the corn law lecturer. Mr. Hoy and others will continue to lecture every week so long as the League agent is lecturing.'(4) Hoy and friends turned up at a lecture given shortly afterwards in St. Mary's Hall by R.R.R. Moore, the peripatetic league speaker: and followed it with one of his own at the Chartist room showing 'that the repeal of the corn law would not be any real benefit, but a positive injury'. Repeal would entail the ruin of arable farming and the displacement of agricultural labourers into competition with a manufacturing population already suffering from surplus productive power. Moreover, foreign lands would not be content merely to supply cheap corn in exchange for British manufactures after repeal: indeed, but for the protective duties which ribbons enjoyed, they

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(1) This was the offer made earlier in the month: Coventry Standard, 19 August 1842.

(2) P.R.O.: H.O. 45/261A, Aylesford to Graham, 25 August, 26 August 1842, Richard Marriott to Graham, 27 August 1842 (and handbill enclosed), Archer Clive to Graham, 27 August 1842, Thomas Wilmot to Graham, 28 August 1842. Coventry Standard and Coventry Herald, 26 August 1842.

(3) The rooms are mentioned in Coventry Standard, 18 November 1842.

(4) Northern Star, 12 November 1842.

would already be strong competitors in the home market. Repeal might well be followed by the extinction of these duties - and there would result the crushing of native industry which depended on manual labour, like the bulk of the ribbon trade. This would be transferred abroad, and Britain would retain only industry where machinery was the productive power. Machinery, which displaced hand-workers and lowered wages, was the real threat to living standards: and significantly, it was the manufacturers whose capital was invested in machinery who wanted repeal.(1) The lesson that the People's Charter was the only remedy for distress was rammed home by George White and Brown (of London) to large Chartist audiences.(2)

But after better times returned to the ribbon trade in the spring of 1843 the debate lost its intensity, as Chartist activity itself dwindled. Lectures in the summer by Bairstow, and Arran of Bradford, drew few listeners. The Standard reported: 'Socialism and Chartism were never very rampant here, but just now they are at a very low ebb'.(3) Two lectures on the Complete Suffrage movement were planned for July: only forty attended the first and the second was cancelled. In the autumn Buckney took the chair for another lecture on the same subject; the thirty who came filled only a fraction of St. Mary's Hall. Lectures by Peter McGrath, and by Biggs of Nottingham on the six points, and a meeting of the Chartist and Complete Suffrage party in St. Mary's Hall seem similarly to have been thinly supported.(4) In the years that followed there

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(1) Coventry Standard, 18 November 1842. See also Coventry Herald, 11 November and 18 November 1842. A few weeks later George White and Starkey 'exposed the rapacity of those who were crying out for corn law repeal'. Buckney and Rattray dissented; a debate was arranged. Northern Star, 10 December 1842. This took place in February, between Rattray and John Mason, the local Chartist lecturer. Mason repeated Hoy's line of argument - that the low prices in the ribbon trade, Coventry's chronic trouble, were caused by overproductive machinery rather than the corn laws and that repeal would be followed by ruin to native industry. Rattray argued that machinery was 'rather a blessing' and that it would be folly to tax it. But the feeling of the meeting was with Mason. Coventry Standard, 10 February 1843. Northern Star, 11 February 1843.

(2) Northern Star, 15 April, 22 April 1843. NB too that Chartists interrupted John Collins, the Birmingham radical, when he came to talk about the Complete Suffrage movement in March. Coventry Herald and Coventry Standard, 24 March 1843. See also Northern Star, 24 September, 5 November, 3 December, 31 December 1842, 18 March 1843 for details of other Chartist activities in this period; also Coventry Herald, 24 February 1843.

(3) Coventry Standard, 30 June 1843. Northern Star, 20 May, 10 June 1843.

(4) Coventry Standard, 7 July, 20 October, 8 December 1843. Coventry Herald, 7 July, 8 September, 20 October, 8 December, 22 December 1843.

seem to have been weekly meetings for the small group of dedicated members of the National Charter Association in the Chartist rooms - with very occasional meetings in St. Mary's Hall or other large buildings for wider audiences.(1) One of these was held in March 1844, when George White delivered another dashing attack on the Anti Corn Law League. This seems to have been the last occasion on which the notion of a middle class alliance was attacked. It was replaced in drawing power in 1844 by the Chartist land plan - 250 coming to the Rose and Crown in July to hear O'Connor lecture on the subject. The visit in 1845 of Thomas Clark, a director of the National Land Company, drew another large audience and by the end of the year there was a flourishing branch of the company in the city: the plan remained popular in the city though figures of membership are lacking. Prominent in Chartist activities in these years were John Gilbert, William Parker and William Housiaux, all weavers; Housiaux was in addition a leader of the figured weavers.(2)

The last large-scale Chartist activity in the city took place in April 1848 - a time of widespread Chartist movement nationally. It was a period of slump and labour disputes in the ribbon trade.(3) Even so, Chartism had less popular support than it had in 1842. Early in the month 300 or 400 Chartists from Coventry, Foleshill, Kenilworth, Brandon and Bedworth gathered in St. Mary's Hall, under the chairmanship of Housiaux, to hear Peter McGrath call for the third petition.(4) In the second week in April (the climax, since the Kennington Common meeting was held on Monday 10 April) the magistrates

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(1) NB William Williams's answer, when pressed at his annual meeting with his constituents for the reason why he had not supported the People's Charter: 'How many Chartists were there in Coventry?' Buckney agreed that there were very few. Coventry Herald, 16 October 1846. It should be added that despite the popularity of the idea of Corn Law repeal in Coventry the League does not seem to have been very active locally in these years, though in the autumn of 1845 the League's solicitors objected to the names of certain Tory electors at the Coventry revision court. The secretary of the Coventry Anti Corn Law Association, Jacob Bright Browett, was condemned for his inactivity by repealers and an Anti Corn Law Union was formed in January 1846 to revitalise the repeal movement in the city. Coventry Standard, 17 February, 28 February 1843, 12 September, 3 October, 17 October 1845. Coventry Herald, 28 February 1845, 23 January 1846.

(2) Northern Star, 6 January, 17 February, 2 March, 27 April, 20 July 1844, 8 October 1845. Coventry Herald, 2 August 1844, 12 March, 12 November 1847.

(3) See Chapter Five, Section III and Chapter Six, Section II.

(4) Coventry Standard and Coventry Herald, 7 April 1848.

swore in 350 special constables and Lord Cardigan,(1) commanding the 11th Hussars at Coventry barracks, was warned by telegram from the War Office to hold his troops in readiness to move to London; he visited Coventry station and arranged for a special train to be held ready, with steam up, to take the hussars and their horses. The specials were not called out and the troops were not needed in either London or Coventry. On the morning of 10 April there were fewer loiterers on the streets than was usual in this city of self-disciplining outworkers 'and not the slightest symptom of agitation visible'.(2) In the evening a crowd estimated by the Standard at 150 and by the Herald at 200 or 300 gathered in the Chartist rooms in Well Street 'to receive communications relative to the Chartist movements connected with the Kennington Common meeting'.(3) Pritchard (another weavers' leader) presided, and J.C. Farn and Housiaux spoke. There were readings from the Northern Star. A planned meeting on Greyfriars Green on Wednesday 12 April was not held owing to rain. 'There has never been anything the matter here, nor is there likely to be.'(4) A fortnight later came the last move - a meeting on Greyfriars Green to memorialise the queen to dismiss the government and appoint one that would make the Charter a cabinet measure. It rained again and only twelve or twenty turned up. The meeting was postponed till the following day. A large crowd then arrived - estimated by the Herald at 1,000 and by the Standard at 300. Speakers were at some pains to stress the entirely peaceful nature of the movement. Pritchard said:

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(1) Cardigan and the 11th Hussars had been in Coventry since 1846. The exemplary conduct of the troops under his command in the city was praised by the Standard. Organised amusements and 'athletic exercises' were laid on for them in the barracks to keep them out of mischief. When the 11th Hussars left the city the Standard expressed regret at the departure of such well-behaved men and thanks for the 'kindness and liberality' of their commander. Coventry Standard, 1 May, 7 August 1846, 16 June 1848.

(2) Coventry Standard, 14 April 1848.

(3) Coventry Herald, 14 April 1848.

(4) loc. cit. See also Coventry Standard, 14 April 1848. NB the comments of David Buckney, a sympathiser, though not now an active Chartist. The special constables were sworn in owing to the fears of Cardigan, 'a very nervous individual ... It was a mere piece of officiousness on the part of Lieut. Colonel Cardigan, interfering with the management of our city. I wish that gentleman to understand, that we are not yet under martial law ... Not a single inhabitant was of the same opinion, or apprehensive that the peace of the town was in danger.' Coventry Standard, 12 May 1848.

> The object of the working men ... was not to produce anarchy and confusion, for certainly nothing could be more irrational, than for the producers of wealth to seek to destroy the fruits of their own labour ... They wanted to see wealth and the fruits of industry more equally distributed, and not for one lady to have an income of 18s.2½d. per minute, while the toiling multitude could scarcely get bread to eat. Yet, because they wanted to alter this unequal state of things, they were stigmatised, and misrepresented as promoters of anarchy and disorder. He wished to show the middle classes of society that their interests, and those of the working man, were really the same; and in addressing the multitude, he desired not to appeal to their animal passions, but to their reason and intellect, and to inculcate the observance of peace, law, and order.(1)

Absent from the proceedings of 1848 were not only the militants like Peter Hoy who had expressed such distaste for a middle-class alliance four or five years before but also the middle-class radicals themselves (save Hemming, the confectioner). David Buckney was a key figure here. He had severed all connection with the local branch of the National Charter Association by the end of 1843 and allied himself with earlier backsliders from the Chartist movement like Taunton, Warden, and Mayo and radicals who had never been Chartists, like Edward Goode, Thomas Bromfield and the Quakers J.B. Browett, Arthur Atkins and Joseph Cash - in pursuit of the Complete Suffrage programme of radical reform and repeal of the corn laws, to be gained peacefully by an alliance of the middle and working classes.(2) He remained an active supporter of the working class and yet was resentful of the feeling against him, as a ribbon manufacturer, which had helped to drive him out of the local branch of the National Charter Association.

> You generally find among the working class, that the true quality of democratic feeling is found only to exist ... This is the plea set up against men like myself, that I have risen above my station. I have not risen. I am still a working man, as industriously employed as any working man in Coventry.(3)

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(1) Coventry Herald, 28 April 1848. Richard Hartopp 'took occasion to disavow for himself and all sensible Chartists, all participation or concurrence in some coarse and violent expressions, which had been made use of by a Chartist on the preceding day, towards a Reporter for the public press, and a Military Officer'. See also Coventry Standard, 28 April 1848. Hemming and Housiaux also spoke.

(2) Coventry Herald, 8 December 1843. In February 1844 Buckney was replaced as treasurer of the local branch of the NCA by John Gilbert: Northern Star, 17 February 1844.

(3) Coventry Standard, 13 December 1844.

Yet two years later, when the Chartists who remained in Coventry were no longer, it seems, attacking the notion of a middle-class alliance (and when, indeed, one of the chief reasons against it had disappeared in the repeal of the corn laws earlier in 1846) Buckney could not accept all the Charter as an immediate aim or the Chartist movement as the right vehicle for the degree of radical reform (an extension of the suffrage and the ballot) he did want. The repeal of the corn laws had shown that gradual change was possible - that 'the higher classes wanted to benefit the lower': gradualism was in any case now to be preferred to revolutionary change because it would permit the concurrent self-improvement of the people through building societies and clubs.

> Legislation had assumed a social and sanitary character ... He believed that the Charter must be reached by intermediate steps, - and it rested ultimately with the people themselves whether they obtained it or not. Even under the Charter they might not be well governed. There would be a need of education and self-government.(1)

Six months later Buckney and Rushton, another early Chartist, were throwing their energies into the foundation of the Loan, Land and Building Association, a society planning to build five cottages per acre for thrifty artisans.(2)

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(1) Coventry Herald, 16 October 1846.

(2) ibid., 30 April 1847.

IV

The Difficulties of Dissent, and the Election of 1847

Among the dissenters of Coventry there was dislike of the normal church rates, and the special vicar's rates from which in the two city parishes of St. Michael and Holy Trinity the stipends of the incumbents were met. An active campaign against these began in 1833. The acts instituting vicar's rates for the two parishes had set up select vestries. Dissenters such as Richard Hands, Edward Bromfield and Richard Marriott were active in a movement to get Hobhouse's act of 1831 applied to the vestries of the two chief churches (and also St. John's) and thus enlarge the parochial constituency. There was some support from Anglicans - notably from Lord Hood of Whitley Abbey - on the ground that the rates were too high. Requisitions signed by 270 ratepayers asking for a poll on the question were presented. But at the poll the requisitionists failed to get the two thirds majority of the ratepayers voting which was necessary for the application of Hobhouse's act.(1) So in September 1833 a new tactic was tried: an association was formed to resist church and vicar's rates and to press for their abolition. By February 1834 3,158 Coventry dissenters had signed a petition to the House of Commons against these grievances. John Sibree, the minister of Vicar Lane

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(1) Coventry Herald, 1 February, 8 February, 15 February, 1 March, 8 March, 15 March, 29 March, 17 May 1833. Bodleian Library: MSS Top. Warwicks. C.4 (MS of William Reader), f. 176.

Independent Chapel(1), was elected by a meeting of Coventry dissenters in Vicar Lane school room (for which Thomas W. Gill of the CPU acted as secretary) to attend a gathering of the United Committee of Dissenters in London and to put the Coventrians' case to their M.P.s. Sibree reported later that little hope of real relief on the church rates question had been held out by Ellice and Bulwer though they had expressed sympathy.(2) Two years later the dissenters of the city petitioned once more for the abolition of church rates and vicar's rates - again unsuccessfully - (3) while a Coventry petition in favour of Melbourne's abortive attempt to render church rates superfluous in 1837 was signed by 1700.(4)

Two forms of direct action were taken by Coventry dissenters after 1833 against church rates and vicar's rates. One was to attempt to vote down the proposal for a rate at the vestry meeting. Only in the case of St. John's was this tactic ever successful. An attempt to defeat the rate was beaten in 1834, but from 1841

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(1) Sibree argued strongly for the disestablishment of the Church of England, though he approved of the current increase in evangelical Anglican clergymen: the High Church vicar of Holy Trinity, Walter Farquhar Hook (whom he accused of Popish tendencies) was an especial object of his dislike. John Sibree, Ecclesiastical Lectures (Coventry, 1831), pp. 7 et seq. He was the most active campaigner against clerical rates in Coventry, urging refusal to pay: see his pamphlets: An Expostulatory Epistle addressed to ... the Bishop of Lichfield and Coventry (London, 1831); The Law of Church Rates Explained and the Duty of Dissenters Recommended (Coventry, 1836); The Ecclesiastical Warfare (London, 1836). His words drew two acrid replies from the dissenting minister of Zion chapel, Nuneaton, J. Pickering, who argued that Sibree was in effect undermining the Anglican bulwark against Popery: A Letter to ... Zion Chapel (Nuneaton, 1836); A Letter to the Rev. J. Sibree (Nuneaton, 1836). Though none approached his militancy almost all the dissenting ministers of Coventry agreed with Sibree on the clerical rates question: Coventry Herald, 31 January 1834, 27 May, 16 December 1836. An exception was Thomas Stephenson, the Wesleyan Methodist minister, who regarded strong drink, horse-racing and bull-baiting, Sabbath-breaking, and the support given to Popery by the annual Maynooth grant as more fitting objects for the dissenters' wrath: see his letter, Coventry Herald, 3 June 1836. Sibree appears to have been one of the two dissenting ministers denounced by the Standard as active workers for Ellice and Williams in the 1837 election and to have been in W.F. Hook's mind when he attacked those dissenting meeting-houses in Coventry which were, 'every Sunday evening, converted after service into political debating societies'. Coventry Standard, 18 August 1837. W.R.W. Stephens, The Life and Letters of Walter Farquhar Hook (London, 1878), pp. 260 et seq.

(2) Coventry Herald, 27 September 1833, 31 January, 21 February, 2 May, 23 May 1834.

(3) Coventry Herald, 27 May 1836.

(4) Coventry Herald, 14 April 1837. Coventry Standard, 7 April 1837.

onwards a committee in which Edward Goode and the dissenting minister E.H. Delf (of West Orchard Independent Chapel, a few yards from St. John's) were prime movers, drummed up the attendance of dissenters at the vestry meetings by handbill and succeeded in getting the proposal for a 6d. church rate negatived by large majorities: by 222 to 154 in 1841, for example.(1)

In St. Michael's this tactic was tried five times. In 1833 the churchwardens proposed a church rate of 1s.6d. - calculated to yield £800. Richard Hands and Henry Merridew confessed their desire to defeat the rate altogether because they were dissenters but gained some support from Anglicans who thought the rate excessive. Hands's proposal to adjourn the meeting for six months was carried. Only two months later the churchwardens tried again, for a 6d. rate: despite the protests of Hands and Richard Marriott this proposal was carried by 259 votes to 124. Next year J.S. Whittem led the opposition to a 6d. rate, but his proposal to quash the rate was beaten by 193 votes to 23. A proposal to negative a 6d. church rate gained only eight votes in 1836. The following year a far more determined effort to organise opposition to the 6d. rate was made by Richard Hands and two dissenting ministers, Rhead and J.T. Bannister of Whitefriars Lane Baptist chapel. The rate was carried, however, by 379 votes to 278. The following year Bannister, Sibree, William Mayo and Richard Hands argued once more against the rate - protracting the proceedings by asking questions about the accounts and demanding to know if evergreens (costing 15s.) with which the church had been decorated were really necessary for the worship of God. The 6d. rate was again carried by a majority of 100.(2) The dissenters of St. Michael's did not try again. Those of Holy Trinity did not apparently try at all to defeat the church rate. And at neither parish was an attempt made to negative the vicar's rates.

The other tactic was to decline to pay the rate when assessed and to allow one's goods to be distrained. The encouragement of

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(1) Coventry Herald, 19 September 1834, 26 November, 3 December 1841, 23 December 1842, 25 February 1848. Coventry Standard, 3 December, 10 December 1841. Delf was active in religious controversy in Coventry but not in politics. He had 'a straightforward, direct, not to say burly, way of dealing with people and things ... occasionally he was charged with rudeness'. Even by Coventry standards Delf appears to have been eccentric: In Memoriam Edward Hickman Delf (Coventry, 1882), pp. 4 et seq.

(2) Coventry Herald, 20 September, 29 November 1833, 12 September 1834, 21 December 1838. Coventry Standard, 16 September 1836, 29 September, 6 October 1837.

this form of resistance to 'clerical despotism' was the purpose of a gathering in July 1838; the dissenters David Buckney, William Taunton, and an otherwise unknown Roman Catholic, George Davies, were the leading spirits here. Those present pledged themselves to allow their goods to be taken for clerical rates and to subscribe to a fund to reimburse distrainees. But only thirty were present.(1) Nothing more was heard of the subscription fund, and the evidence suggests that very few in fact in these years were willing to carry resistance so far that the bailiffs arrived.(2) Sibree had four chairs, a table, and twelve books seized for non-payment of a St. Michael's vicar's rate of 6s. Such excessive seizure for small amounts was usual: 24 books, 35 lbs of leather, 49 lbs of bacon, or 28 lbs of loaf sugar were other items seized for similar debts. The exorbitant price that had to be paid for principle was responsible for the frequent agreement of dissenters to pay once the case had reached the magistrates' court - as John Dickinson, cabinet maker, did in 1838, though 'he was determined not to pay without entering his protest against such an accursed law, the framers of which ought to have been sent to the treadmill'.(3) For those who were willing to be distrained upon, one exemplary sacrifice seems to have been sufficient - even in the case of Sibree - and no distraints at all are recorded after 1838: even George Hemming, the militant dissenting confectioner (and Chartist) paid up when in 1843 he was summoned.(4) Thus Buckney was exaggerating the quiescence of Coventry dissenters only slightly when he complained in 1845 that 'scarcely half-a-dozen' Coventrians had had their goods seized for conscience' sake.(5) The persistent tendency of some nonconformists in voting Tory at parliamentary elections was another reflection of

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(1) Coventry Herald and Coventry Standard, 27 July 1838.

(2) Those who are known to have done so are the Quakers Arthur Atkins, John Gulson, Joseph and Josiah Cash, and William Browett, and Edward Bromfield, William Mayo, Richard Hands, J.B. Whittem, Edward Connop, John Warden, David Buckney and John Sibree - the only dissenting minister apparently to refuse to pay.

(3) Coventry Herald, 26 October 1838.

(4) For this paragraph, see Coventry Herald, 14 June 1833, 18 July 1834, 1 July, 8 July 1836, 11 August 1837, 19 January, 26 October 1838, Coventry Standard, 26 January 1838, 7 July 1843.

(5) Coventry Standard, 3 October 1845.

the lack of militancy among Coventry dissent.(1) But the list of those active in the anti-church rate movement included most of the leading liberals and radicals of the city. Liberalism and dissent overlapped in Coventry.

The mechanics' institution movement was a field where radicals and dissenters on one side, and Anglicans and Tories on the other, met in battle. The mechanics' institution was founded in 1828, by a group of dissenters, most of whom were active liberals too.(2) Radical dissenters dominated the committee too, though there were some Anglican members of the institution.(3) The dissenting

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(1) NB the letter of a 'Spon Street Dissenter'. Coventry Standard, 30 March 1838: 'It is too much the fault of the Conservative press to include the whole body of the Dissenters, when speaking of the enemies of the establishment ... Hit as hard as you please the Radical portion of the Dissenters, but at the same time give the Conservative Dissenters credit for equal sincerity in wishing to uphold an Established Church, believing ... that it is a barrier against Popery on the one hand, and infidelity on the other.' The writer alleged that nearly half the dissenters of Coventry voted for Conservative candidates at parliamentary elections. It seems unlikely that the lack of militancy among dissenters reflected numerical weakness. The percentages of Anglicans, Protestant dissenters and Roman Catholics in those attending divine services on 'census Sunday' 1851 were 45.3, 39.6, and 15.1 respectively. (Percentages have been calculated from the totals in P.P.: [1690] H.C. (1852-53) lxxxix: Population of Great Britain, 1851: Religious Worship, England and Wales, p. 77). This evidence, though cryptic, suggests that Protestant dissenters were not greatly fewer in number than Anglicans, and that the dissenters and Roman Catholics together (a justifiable addition since both groups resented paying church rates) outnumbered Anglicans. And Wesleyan Methodists (arguably less militant than the other dissenting groups on the church rate question) totalled only 445 'attenders' out of 5617 Protestant dissenters; there were also 335 Primitive Methodists. On the other hand, the Roman Catholic figures for Coventry look very odd; their total of 900 morning and 1,000 evening worshippers goes against the national pattern of concentration at the morning mass. In addition, there were said to be only 800 Catholic sittings altogether. Even when all attendances are simply aggregated and no allowance is made for 'double worshipping' only 40.2 per cent of the population of Coventry attended; most large towns had similarly low indices of attendance. See K.S. Inglis, 'Patterns of Religious Worship in 1851', Journal of Ecclesiastical History, xi (1960), pp. 74 et seq.

(2) James Jenkins, Edward Goode, Benjamin Poole, Charles Bill, William Browett and Samuel Hennell - to whom should be added the Quaker Josiah Cash, a dissenter but not an active liberal.

(3) Of the dominant committee members in the early years, Richard Hands, Sibree, J.S. Whittem and Charles Bray were active radicals; John Gulson and Josiah Cash were not. All these were dissenters - save the freethinking Bray. The president from 1830 onwards was the politically liberal Anglican, A.F. Gregory, of Stivichall Hall.

founders planned that it should serve all shades of opinion in the city and that disruptive controversy should be avoided by the total exclusion of political and religious discussion from the institution and books on these topics from the library. The institution was not involved in controversy at first.(1) Trouble came in 1835. A group of Anglican Sunday-school teachers from Holy Trinity Church who had joined the institution complained to their vicar, W.F. Hook, that it had been 'started by the Political Union' and was managed by 'Radicals and Dissenters'.(2) Hook therefore began the Coventry Religious and Useful Knowledge Society in May 1835 as an Anglican mechanics' institution in direct competition with the original one. It was nominally open to all. 'It offers a banquet where every visitor may satisfactorily regale, whatever the peculiarities of his taste, or the variety of his fancy, presuming that he be either a Christian or a moralist, or both; where Whig, Tory, and truly reforming Radical may intermingle for good.'(3) But in tone the society was Tory and was firmly under the control of the Anglican church; the bishop and archdeacon were president and vice-president, and all local Anglican clergymen ex officio members of the committee: they thus dominated it. The laymen who supplemented them there were all, naturally, Anglican too - with the Tories William Wilmot, George Eld, R.K. Rotherham, Thomas Cope, Isaac Caldicott, and Peter Gregory prominent among them. Thomas Banbury seems to have been the only Whig. Speakers at the annual meetings reiterated that the purpose of the society was to ensure that the education offered was given in an Anglican context.(4) The society 'was a kind of University to our National

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(1) The institution was founded to teach through lectures and classes both the 3 Rs and the sciences so as 'to cultivate the minds of the working classes of the community, by which it is expected their comforts and happiness will be increased, and the trades they respectively follow greatly benefitted'. C.W.C.: Coventry Miscellany (Broadsides), i, p. 17, Address from the Provisional Committee of the Coventry Mechanics' Institution, 30 September 1828. Besides the elementary classes, there was in the early years instruction in geometry, drawing, geography and music, and lectures given by members of the society (especially Charles Bray) on anatomy, the steam engine, chemistry, and education. Novels and plays - 'fictious works of sorrow' - were excluded from the library. For the above section, see Coventry Herald, 5 September, 19 September 1828, 9 October 1829, 3 September, 10 September 1830, 13 July 1832. C.W.C.: loc. cit and Report of the Sixth Annual Meeting of ... the Coventry Mechanics' Institution, (Coventry, 1834), pp. 3 et seq.

(2) W.R.W. Stephens, The Life and Letters of Walter Farquhar Hook, (London, 1878), p. 181.

(3) Coventry Standard, 1 September 1837. The society's syllabus was very like the institution's - though the library included works of fiction because of Hook's taste for literature.

(4) Thus, for example, Hook lectured in 1837 on the connection between astronomy and religion and in the following year there was a

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and Sunday schools'.(1) 'Within the line drawn by the Church we determined to act with liberality'(2), said Hook, but infidels and Unitarians were told that they were not welcome, members were warned not to support the godless mechanics' institution, and Tory journals such as Blackwood's Magazine, the New Monthly and the British Magazine were the chief ones taken in the reading room.(3) The mechanics' institution continued to emphasise its neutral character in politics and religion and its willingness to welcome all who accepted this neutrality. But after the setting up of its rival the institution lost all save a few Anglicans, such as Abijah Hill Pears.(4) On the other hand, the majority of its members found that it became too eclectic in its membership for their taste, since by the late 1830s it included some Owenites whose activities and ideas they could not tolerate.

A group of Owenites existed in Coventry in the late 1820s; short-lived cooperative stores were founded in Spon Street, New Street and Foleshill.(5) After the partly Owenite phenomenon of the Coventry branch of the GNCTU there was a revival of millenial Owenism at the end of 1837 and the spring of 1838. There were lectures by the socialist missionaries Alexander Fleming, Rigby of Manchester, and Joseph Smith of Salford ('Shepherd' Smith) on the possibility of perfecting man by altering the environment that conditioned him. There were also readings from the Social Bible. Between 400 and 500 attended Rigby's meeting in March and about the same time rooms were acquired for the Owenite socialists in the George Inn in Little Park Street - the home of Chartism too. Prominent in this Owenite group were Charles Bray, David Buckney, William Taunton, James Rushton, J.C. Farn, and John Watts, the

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(4 cont.) course of lectures on the proof of design in the animal frame.

(1) Coventry Standard, 26 August 1836.

(2) Coventry Standard, 26 July 1839.

(3) On the CRUKS, see, in addition to the references above, Coventry Standard, 25 August 1837, 12 October 1838, 18 September 1840. Coventry Herald, 29 April 1836. W.R.W. Stephens, op. cit., pp. 179 et seq. C.W.C.: Catalogue of Books belonging to the Coventry Society for Promoting Religious and Useful Knowledge (Coventry, 1843). NB the speech of the Rev. Mr. Docker of Nuneaton at the 1838 annual general meeting of the CRUKS: 'There did not appear to be a more dangerous character than a religious liberal. How could he amalgamate with the bloody-minded Roman Catholic, or with the cold-hearted Unitarian, who possessed the skeleton of religion, but denied its power?' Coventry Herald, 12 October 1838.

(4) Coventry Herald, 12 June, 2 October 1835, 7 October 1836. Coventry Standard, 1 November 1837, 13 July 1838.

(5) Coventry Observer, 11 March 1830. Coventry Perseverance Cooperative Society: Jubilee History (Coventry, 1917), p. 21.

assistant secretary and librarian, from 1830 to 1838, of the mechanics' institution - to which many of the city's Owenites belonged. Their movement attracted the active hostility of leading dissenters; Rhead and the Rev. J.T. Bannister turned up at meetings to question speakers and convict them of infidelity, and it was dissenting opposition that led the mayor to refuse to the Coventry Owenites in May 1838 the use of official premises for their meetings.(1) As to the Owenites in the mechanics' institution, 'the knowledge they had acquired through its medium made them desirous of obtaining more, and of applying that knowledge to practical purposes; the clergy and other obstructionists stood in the way'.(2) The last straw for the committee of the institution was the discovery in 1838 of certain books - in particular Owen's Observations on the New Lanark Schools and J.M. Morgan's The Hampden of the Nineteenth Century - which had been given to the institution by Owen himself and added to its library by Watts. A great row followed: the books were removed in the summer of 1838, about sixty or seventy Owenites seceded from the institution soon after, taking the objectionable books with them, and much was made by the institution of the 'revision' of the library and the return to strict neutrality.(3)

(1) Coventry Standard, 29 December 1837, 9 March, 18 May 1838. Coventry Herald, 2 March, 6 April 1838. J.C. Farn, 'The Auto-biography of a Living Publicist', The Reasoner, 17 February 1858, p. 51. For an Anglican commentary on Rigby's lecture see H.W. Hawkes, A Treatise on Original Sin and other General Matters (Coventry, c. 1838), pp. 3, 10 et seq: the 'flimsiness, rubbish and filth' of Owenism is attacked - and the 'presumptuous, deceitful' Pickwick Papers. John Watts, the son of a ribbon weaver, was born in 1818. He moved from Coventry in 1840, became a socialist missionary, and remained a keen co-operator for the rest of his life, writing regularly for the Co-operative News. See D.N.B.

(2) New Moral World, 18 July 1840. See also the comments of J.C. Farn on the fate of this Owenite group at the institution: 'Our subjects were of the most comprehensive character: we discussed the uses of history, the cause of light and heat, the apparent discrepancies between the moral and material world ... and on all subjects, after warm and earnest debate, came to the most liberal conclusions, and the directors became alarmed at the threats of withdrawal of support from members of the various Dissenting denominations, then, as now, the incessant talkers about religious liberty ... the intolerants had it all their way.' op.cit., 3 February 1858, p. 38.

(3) Coventry Standard, 15 June, 13 July, 27 July 1838, 31 January 1840, 8 October, 5 November 1841. Coventry Herald, 5 October 1838. Bray was not among the seceders. The institution's renewed declarations of neutrality did not lead to any rapprochement with the CRUKS. They remained separate, and quarrelling. For many years only one Anglican clergyman could be induced to join the CMI - the Rev. W. Drake, in November 1841, after satisfying himself that it was truly neutral. The attitude of CRUKS supporters was that 'education unconnected with religion is worse than no education at all'. Coventry Standard, 5 November, 19 November 1841. After some years of much diminished acrimony, the two institutions amalgamated in 1855.

Early in 1839 J.T. Bannister gave a course of lectures attacking the errors of the Socialists. They invited Alexander Campbell, the Socialist missionary, to lecture to them and Campbell challenged Bannister to a debate. There were committees of supporters for each. Bannister's included orthodox dissenters such as Edward Goode, Thomas Bromfield and William Mayo; prominent in Campbell's were John Watts, William Fletcher, J.C. Farn and William Taunton, seceders from the mechanics' institution. The debate extended over three evenings. The audiences got progressively larger and on the final evening St. Mary's Hall began to fill two and a half hours before the meeting opened. Bannister advanced the argument for free will and Campbell the Owenite determinist case, attacking the social system 'rotten to its very core', which could produce executions, transportations and extremes of wealth and poverty. 'These are the effects of man's belief in the doctrine of responsibility. They have no other method for improving the human character but hanging up a few individuals as a warning to others not to do the like.'(1) The most heated discussion concerned the sexual implications of the socialist utopia. 'If Robert Owen is to be the God of the New Moral World,' said Bannister, 'and his base proposals are reduced to practice, every woman will be a prostitute, every man a debauchee, and the world itself one universal brothel'.(2)

Some months later the anti-Owenite theme was taken up again by John Brindley, the headmaster of Oldswinford Hospital, Stourbridge, in four lectures on 'The Errors of Socialism' in St. Mary's Hall. The chair was taken at the first lecture by the Rev. J. Howells, the vicar of Holy Trinity, and at the second by the Rev. Francis Franklin, minister of Cow Lane Baptist chapel. Alexander Fleming and William Taunton asked for a discussion of Brindley's lectures

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(1) C.W.C.: Pamphlets Collection, Socialism: Public Discussion between Mr. Alexander Campbell, Socialist Missionary, and the Rev. J.T. Bannister (Coventry, 1839), p. 69.

(2) ibid., p. 87. For this paragraph, see ibid, pp. 3 et seq; Coventry Standard, 18 January, 1 February 1839. See also 'Jonathan Jonathan', Socialism: A Commentary on the Public Discussion on the Subjects of Necessity and Responsibility ... (Coventry, 1839) - a pamphlet demonstrably by Charles Bray, arguing that the will is not free but that man had to behave as though it were; both Bannister and Campbell were wrong. After the discussion Bannister was presented with a testimonial purse for £70 - £10 more than his annual stipend at Greyfriars Lane - which was partly the profit from a 1s.6d. tea for 400 organised by the wives of dissenting ministers in Coventry in St. Mary's Hall: a tea for which, we are told, some Anglicans had been happy to buy tickets. Socialism: Public Discussion, p. 90.

but were refused. The use of St. Mary's Hall was withdrawn by the mayor after these two lectures, on the grounds that Brindley had violated the terms of his hire of the hall, in spending far more time in attacking Socialism than in defending Christianity. There followed one of the oddest deputations to visit the mayor in these years. The liberal and dissenting Sibree and Dr. Nankivell, together with the Anglican Tories George Eld and E.H. Woodcock, pleaded with the mayor to permit Brindley to speak again: their efforts were vain, and Brindley had to give his last lectures in the Coventry Theatre.(1) The Owenites were of course not reconciled by this campaign and in the autumn of 1839 collected £100 and bought modest premises in Well Street for their Universal Community Society to use as a Hall of Science.(2) And in 1840 the same group founded a cooperative store in the Burges; this existed for some three years, its manager being William Taunton, until it collapsed. Taunton and Farn (like John Watts) also became Owenite missionaries at this time, Farn serving in Staffordshire, Liverpool and Scotland, before returning to Coventry.(3)

Theological differences between Owenites and orthodox dissenters ceased to be publicly disputed. From 1843 onwards, however, they were divided by another issue. This was education - an issue which now obsessed the activist dissenters of the city. Earlier they had

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(1) Coventry Standard, 28 June, 5 July, 12 July, 9 August 1839. After Brindley's last lecture - like the others, a strong attack on the 'infidelity' of Owenism, John Watts (now the president of the local Owenite society) said that Coventry Owenites disclaimed any of Owen's opinions that were incompatible with Christianity. Note also that William Taunton, who had been a Sunday school teacher at Vicar Lane chapel, did not cease to believe in the divinity of Christ or the freedom of the will, and regarded Owenism as 'a revival of primitive Christianity'; Taunton was cultivated - Irenaeus, Tertullian Justin Martyr and John Locke being some of the authors he had read. ibid, 5 July 1839, 17 February 1843. John Farn, originally a Wesleyan Methodist, also did not cease to be a Christian when becoming a Socialist. 'The Autobiography of a Living Publicist', The Reasoner, 17 February 1858, p. 50, 7 April 1858, p. 107. NB also the opinion of W. Hawkes Smith, the Birmingham Owenite and Unitarian with close Coventry connections, that Socialism was identical with true Christianity. Coventry Standard, 1 June 1838.

(2) ibid., 6 December, 20 December, 27 December 1839, 14 February 1840. Coventry Herald, 25 October 1839.

(3) Coventry Perseverance Co-operative Society: Jubilee History, p. 22. Coventry Standard, 7 June, 13 September 1839, 17 February 1843. J.C. Farn, 'The Autobiography of a Living Publicist', The Reasoner, 17 February 1858, pp. 50 et seq. See also the passing reference to the Coventry Owenites in Coventry Herald, 29 December 1843. Brian Richardson was another Coventrian who became an Owenite missionary about 1840. Coventry Herald, 19 May 1843.

been strongly in favour of the state provision of schools.(1) In 1843, however, there was a significant shift of opinion on the question among dissenters in Coventry. Sir James Graham's factory bill of that year envisaged the setting up of factory schools under the control of the Anglican clergy. The dissenting ministers of the city, Edward Goode and the Quaker A. Atkins, were prominent in immediately protesting against the educational clauses and in requisitioning Abijah Hill Pears, the mayor, for a public meeting in St. Mary's Hall.(2) At this Pears himself spoke as a liberal churchman against the bill, 'which had very many objectionable clauses; some of them interfered with the rights of conscience, and the civil and religious liberty of the subject'.(3) John Watts (a minister at Cow Lane Baptist chapel)(4), John Gordon and James Sibley Whittem, as dissenters, used stronger language. Gordon thought the bill an example of the desire for centralisation that had produced the rural police and the New Poor Law. 'The Government were interested in putting down the people of this country. Why did not the Government, if they meant to educate the people, extend the franchise?'(5) He and his friends stood fast

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(1) In 1837 the local and short-lived branch of the Central Education Society had been founded by, and proposals that the State should provide schools for all children where the religious instruction should be non-sectarian had been advanced by, dissenters like Sibree, Henry Merridew, J.S. Whittem, John Gulson, David Buckney, C.B. Nankivell, A. Atkins and the Rev. Henry Wreford (the Unitarian minister), the Rev. Thomas Cockshoot (the Roman Catholic priest of St. Osburg's), and above all by Charles Bray. Thomas Banbury was the only Anglican prominent in this move and the only member of the CRUKS. All the other laymen mentioned were active in the mechanics' institution. All the Anglican clergy in the town turned up to the counter-meeting to press the special and unique position that the Church of England should occupy in any 'national' education system - a meeting disrupted by radicals led by Bray and Buckney, who at one point rushed the platform and forced the Anglicans to leave. Coventry Standard, 3 November, 1 December, 8 December 1837.

(2) Coventry Herald, 14 April 1843. Coventry Standard, 21 April 1843. Pears, a ribbon manufacturer, married Charles Bray's sister, Elizabeth.

(3) Coventry Standard, 5 May 1843. NB also Pears's letter, Coventry Standard, 12 May 1843.

(4) Not to be confused with John Watts the Owenite who had by this time left Coventry.

(5) Coventry Standard, 5 May 1843.

on the need for the rejection of the bill, and for voluntaryism in education. They opposed any scheme of National Education, with State schools, as likely to lead (because of the Government attitude revealed by Graham's bill) to Anglican domination. One Owenite - David Buckney - strongly opposed the bill because of its treatment of dissent. Other Owenites - Charles Bray, Brian Richardson, J.C. Farn and William Taunton - believed that though the bill was defective, giving too much power to the Church of England, it was better than nothing and should be accepted as a step towards the large-scale State provision that was needed because of the gross inadequacy of voluntaryism. Bray's speech caused uproar and its length threatened to prolong the meeting beyond the life of the candles in St. Mary's Hall. As they guttered Pears could only succeed in getting the resolution against the bill carried, and the meeting closed, by promising the Socialists the use of the hall to discuss their attitude to education.(1)

At this meeting, held a few weeks later, the Owenites and the voluntaryist dissenters quarrelled once more. Gordon and his friends hated the bill, and the Owenites gave it a tepid welcome. But the discussion on this point quickly led to a more rancorous disagreement on the wider question of national as against voluntaryist education. Gordon attacked the former and praised the latter, instancing the success of Methodism in making the people of Staffordshire more moral. Farn disagreed, denied that Methodism had done much, and pointed to the 'revolting immorality' of Bilston. He, Taunton and Richardson argued for a scheme of national education, to remove 'the mental deadness and moral degradation of the mass of the British people ... and based on the great principles of moral justice and intellectual elevation, apart from all theological opinions'.(2) All three argued that sectarian religion did not necessarily inculcate morality and was better left out. This angered

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(1) Coventry Standard and Coventry Herald, 5 May 1843.

(2) Coventry Standard, 19 May 1843.

Gordon.(1)

The dispute revived in 1847 after the publication of the new government scheme for education.(2) The Anglican clergy, led by Thomas Sheepshanks and J.B. Collison of St. Michael's, approved of it; so did Abijah Hill Pears. So too did David Buckney, who announced that though he had opposed Graham's bill because it placed dissent at a disadvantage he favoured the new scheme because it placed it on an equality with the Anglican church: the voluntary system was inadequate, and under it 4,000 children in Coventry were getting no education at all.

> As to the working classes, they had not been able to get their rights for want of education. It was for want of education they had not known how to unite their means for any given purpose - as, for instance, the middle classes had done for the repeal of the Corn Laws ... Poverty was a source of crime, yet he contended that an increase of intelligence among the working classes could teach them the folly of intemperance and place intellectual resources in their power, by means of which they would know how to husband their resources ... In numerous cases he believed that ignorance was the cause of poverty, and he believed that by preventing the progress of intelligence we were perpetuating both poverty and crime.(3)

Taunton, J.C. Farn and Joseph Squiers, the Owenite master of Thomas Street school and the Secretary of the Labourers' and Artizans' Friend Society which Bray had helped to start, also welcomed the government scheme. Squiers had found the voluntary system inadequate at Thomas Street: 1,590 children had passed through the school but only 90 had attended regularly. 'We ought not to rest satisfied with travelling on the old pack-horse road, as our

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(1) Coventry Standard and Coventry Herald, 19 May 1843. Gordon elaborated his views in his pamphlet (C.W.C.) Ought the Government to Educate the People? The Question of National Education Considered in a Letter to a Friend (Coventry, 1843), pp. 1 et seq. He was opposed to secular education, and much more so to the idea of national education. The people's ignorance was due largely to their poverty, and this to unjust legislation. If this was removed, all would be well and the voluntary system could cope. A central board and an army of inspectors would be an essential part of any scheme of national education: and this machinery might well be used by the government to interfere with religious and political liberty - just as (he thought) Graham's bill was intended to provide the means of keeping the factory districts quiescent in any future emergency like that of the summer of 1842. The 1843 factory bill was dropped, and the act of 1844 omitted the offensive, and effective, educational provisions.

(2) The scheme envisaged the extension of state provision by indirect means - by the payment of state grants to apprenticed pupil-teachers in voluntary schools, to the teachers who instructed them, and (as supplements to their salaries) to teachers who were successful in the new state certification examination. The various modes of government assessment and supervision entailed a large increase in state control.

(3) Coventry Herald, 19 March 1847.

fathers had done, but keep pace with the times and travel at the railroad speed of 40 miles per hour.'(1) Charles Bray took the same line, calling the dissenting opponents of the scheme 'fanatical voluntaries' and writing for his newspaper, the Herald, an article attacking them bitterly.(2)

Bray's jibe about 'fanatical voluntaries' enraged John Gordon. 'He begged to say that from the hand which threw that dirt, all the water in the Baths and Washhouses which it might succeed in erecting, would not wash out the stain.'(3) Gordon led the dissenting clergy of the city (and many laymen, among whom Edward Goode was the most prominent) in vehement opposition to the scheme: they were opposed to all state payments for religious pruposes. John Sibree compared the struggle to that over Ship Money. The trustees of the British school attached to his chapel, Vicar Lane, returned the £200 government grant made in 1835. And at the crucial public meeting in April the voluntaryists bitterly attacked the scheme but were defeated in their motion of rejection by the weight of Anglican votes - while the Owenites voted with the Anglicans.(4) Both M.P.s - Ellice and Williams - favoured the government scheme and deprecated the attitude of the dissenting voluntaryists. The wrath of these last was turned against both Williams and Ellice, and particularly against Williams, whom they regarded traditionally

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(1) loc. cit.

(2) Coventry Herald, 19 March, 23 April 1847. Coventry Standard, 19 March, 23 April 1847. Bray's article was 'A leaf from a Non-conformist Dictionary': 'Dissent - opposition to the Church: Voluntaryism - A Sort of Dog in the Manger, which will neither move forward himself, nor allow anyone else. Liberty - every one to do as he chooses, whether in accordance with the public good or not. It is loudly demanded by thieves and pickpockets. Slavery - to be subject to law, order, and system, instead of the chance empiricism of local cliques. Bribery - making up the deficiencies of the Voluntary System. Giving the people their own money, instead of making them dependent upon charity, in the shape of voluntary contributions. Education - teaching the road to Chapel, through the Sunday school.' Coventry Herald, 19 March 1847.

(3) Coventry Herald, 19 March 1847. Bray was currently pressing in the town council for the establishment of public baths in the city and got a committee appointed to consider the question in May. Coventry Standard, 14 May 1847.

(4) Coventry Herald, 19 March, 23 April 1847. Coventry Standard, 19 March, 16 April, 23 April, 23 July 1847.

as especially their man.(1) In June the Coventry Anti-State Church Society was formed - Sibree, Gordon, Watts, and Edward Goode being the most prominent members; its aim was to free religion (and education too, of course) from all state interference and its leaders threatened at its first meeting not to vote for Ellice and Williams at the forthcoming general election. One month later Williams was pointedly omitted from the list of M.P.s approved by the dissenting deputies at their meeting in London.(2)

So important was the education question in 1847 that it was the only issue of which Ellice made specific mention in his election address published in July. He defended his attitude at some length.

> I entertain the same objections I have always felt, to grants from funds raised by taxation on all classes and sects, for the partial or exclusive advantage of any particular class or sect ... Still, I have readily agreed to the grants hitherto made, as the only alternative, to refusing the just claims of the poor and friendless, for assistance from the State, in this first step to the moral improvement of their condition.(3)

Williams's address stood in contrast. Once again he made detailed reference to his policies for the extension of the franchise, shorter Parliaments, the ballot, the abolition of flogging in the armed forces and the death penalty (except for murder), the reduction of taxation and the end of church rates; in education he wished for

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(1) Coventry Standard, 16 July 1847. See the letters of the two M.P.s in Coventry Herald and Coventry Standard, 16 April, 23 April 1847. The dissenting voluntaryists of the city had been most angry with Williams in 1845, because he, like Ellice, had voted for the Maynooth grant. On this earlier occasion too the dissenters had been less angry with Ellice than Williams, since Ellice had regarded the grant merely as a means of conciliating Ireland and Williams as justifiable as a support for education - thus emphasising his support for a national education scheme, of which he made no secret, speaking on it at his visits to Coventry. When he came in October 1845 Edward Goode, George Baddeley and David Smith refused to respond to Buckney's toasting of Williams, because of their disgust at his vote for Maynooth. It was then that Buckney caused uproar by contrasting their mock-courage over Maynooth with their real cowardice over church rates, which (he said) only half-a-dozen men had refused to pay in Coventry. One year later some dissenters called out 'No, No' at the dinner when Taunton praised Williams as a 'faithful, upright and conscientious member'. Coventry Standard, 18 April, 25 April, 16 May, 6 June, 3 October 1845, 16 October 1846. Coventry Herald, 18 April, 16 May, 3 October 1845, 16 October 1846.

(2) Coventry Herald, 18 June, 25 June 1847. Coventry Standard, 16 July 1847.

(3) C.w.C.: Broadsides Collection, Edward Ellice, To the Freemen and Electors of the City of Coventry, 19 July 1847. In other respects the address was a classic example of Ellice's resting on his laurels, making no specific reference to points of policy, and claiming an unfettered right to vote as he thought proper as issues presented themselves in Parliament.

'fairness to all'.(1) The Conservatives of the city argued that since Corn Law repeal there was no difference between Whigs and Tories, and that both should unite against radicals. They searched for a third candidate who might serve to divide Ellice from Williams and run with the former against the latter. Such was the burden of resolutions passed by meetings of Conservative electors in July. The third man was brought forward just before the poll - George James Turner, a Chancery barrister.(2) Apart from its mention of his attachment to the Church of England there was little to choose between Turner's address and Ellice's. Turner wished to give 'full effect to the liberal policy which has lately been adopted with reference to the trade and commerce of the country', and to reduce taxation on articles of popular consumption.(3)

After Turner's arrival in Coventry there were two days of hectic campaigning. Turner made clear that he did not oppose Ellice; 'he was not there to offer any opposition to him, but to his colleague'.(4) Conservative broadsides made much of the similarity in attitude of Ellice and Turner - and in particular their support of corn law repeal - and derided Williams as an extreme radical who had traditionally gained victory by dissembling his principles to gain Whig votes and by tapping Ellice's money to pay for his campaign: the split with the dissenters was played on.(5) Ellice and Williams spoke separately but in effect solicited votes for each other; Ellice paraded his 'independence' but went out of his way to pay tribute to Williams and to stress that they were united on all save minor matters; the only difference between them was that Williams 'would not bend on occasions when he sometimes risked displeasure by bending'. Ellice said he disagreed totally with the 'public principles' of Turner.(6) The two liberal committees (one for each candidate) worked together. Their broadsides

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(1) Coventry Standard, 23 July 1847.

(2) Coventry Standard, 23 July, 30 July 1847. Coventry Herald, 9 July, 23 July, 30 July 1847. For Turner, See D.N.B.

(3) C.W.C.: Broadsides Collection, George James Turner, To the Worthy and Independent Freemen and Electors of the City of Coventry, 26 July 1847.

(4) C.W.C.: Broadsides Collection, Speech of George James Turner, 27 July 1847.

(5) C.W.C.: Broadsides Collection, 'An Elector', Ellice and Turner, 28 July 1847; Coventry Election: Copy of a Packet of Letters picked up between Mill Lane and the Railway Station - a spoof correspondence between Williams and Buckney on the best tricks to use in the campaign.

(6) Coventry Standard, 30 July 1847.

concentrated on the past - on the thirty-year-old liberal alliance for reform, against the 'soulless, heartless, senseless faction' who had raised 'every obstacle to the abolition of those laws against the admission of cheap food'.(1) The traditional message of William Wilmot was the reality behind the smooth words of Turner: his return would be followed by an attempt to 'make the Church a rampant Hierarchy, and re-enact the duties on the importation of Food'.(2) And anxious about the growing possibility that Turner, far less sympathetic to nonconformist claims than Williams, would be returned, the Anti-State Church Association hurriedly called a meeting shortly before the poll, discussed matters with Ellice and Williams, repented its earlier intransigence, announced that its differences of opinion with the liberal candidates were only minor, and called upon dissenters to vote for them.(3)

But this move came too late. Some dissenters had already been turned irrevocably against the liberal candidates and they refused to vote for them, apparently abstaining. Their numbers were few, and they did not harm Ellice. But they and 200 liberal electors who voted for Ellice and Turner were sufficient to lose the contest for Williams. These 200 included the staunch Ellicites who had resented for years the circumstances of Williams' coming to Coventry and the alleged juggling by the radical organisers

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(1) C.W.C.: Broadsides Collection, 'A firm friend to Ellice and Williams, and an Old Blue of Thirty Years Standing', To the Independent Freemen and Electors of the City of Coventry, 24 July 1847.

(2) C.W.C.: Broadsides Collection, 'A Freeman, and Lover of Freedom', To the Freemen and Electors of Coventry, July 1847. See also 'Tom Pain Esq', To the Worthy and Independent Freemen of the City of Coventry, 26 July 1847 - a spoof attacking the reactionary weaver of Well Street, and the alleged Tory plans to unseat Ellice should he be returned with Turner.

(3) Coventry Standard, 30 July 1847. C.W.C.: Broadsides Collection, E.H. Delf and Thomas Berry, To the Nonconformist Electors of the City of Coventry, 27 July 1847. See also the letter of John Gordon, quoting the Nonconformist Association's correspondence with Williams in June and July 1847, for an account of the attempts to resolve this dispute, in Coventry Herald, 21 January 1848.

which had placed Williams at the head of the poll in 1835 and 1841.(1) And they saw no reason to vote for Williams now that the cause of Corn Law repeal - which had been supported by most Coventry electors in 1841 - was no longer an active issue binding them together in opposition to the Tories. They accepted Conservative arguments and saw far more unity of principle between Ellice and Turner than between Ellice and Williams. As David Buckney later put it: they had defected because there was no great issue like the Corn Laws or the Reform Bill before the public. 'He had in fact heard persons say that they could not see any difference between the Whigs and the Tories, because the Tories had become liberals - that Peel was as good a reformer as Lord John Russell.' Too few had agreed with Buckney that 'Toryism wanted to make them hewers of wood and drawers of water, while the other party wanted them to enjoy every blessing'.(2) Finally, a

(1) Coventry Standard, 14 January 1848. Coventry Herald, 30 July, 6 August 1847. NB the comments of the Herald on the defectors: 30 July 1847: 'those old friends of the liberal cause ... deserted their principles for the sake of venting their spleen for some alleged folly of William Williams's particular supporters at the last election'; and ibid., 6 August 1847: 'thirteen years ago, Mr. Williams was introduced to this constituency in opposition to Mr. Ellice. That was a great mistake, if not a fault, and the Blues have not forgotten it. Six years ago, another folly was committed by some of the over-zealous friends of the Charter, who voted for Williams and a Tory, and got up a small triumph by placing Williams at the head of the poll.' See also on this point C.W.C.: Broadsides Collection, 'An Old Liberal', To the Freemen and Electors of Coventry, 26 July 1847: 'The Old Blues cannot forget who have been Mr. Ellice's most inveterate assailants' - though it is true that the broadside calls not for an alliance with Turner, but for no coalition at all, with either Right or Left, both tainted. See also the letter of Benjamin Poole, Coventry Watchman, 7 September 1850, a bitter rehearsal of radical iniquities since 1835. Poole was almost certainly the author of the broadside by 'An Old Liberal'.

(2) Coventry Standard, 14 January 1848. Buckney was speaking at a valedictory dinner for Williams. 1290 voted for Turner and Ellice - most of them being Conservatives. 17 voted for Turner and Williams - a sign that the Tory-radical alliance of the 1820s was now quite dead. 1479 voted for Ellice and Williams. There were also 413 plumpers for Turner, 104 for Ellice and 132 for Williams. The totals were Ellice 2901, Turner 1754, Williams 1633. These figures are taken from A Correct Copy of the Poll (Coventry, 1847) as corrected by Coventry Standard, 10 September 1847. NB the comments of Ellice, immediately after the poll. 'He could not conceal from himself the doubtful nature of the support he had received, seeing that many of those who had voted for him that day were formerly amongst his most violent opponents. He was satisfied that this change had in some degree arisen from the fact that there was no longer that great separation in feeling which had formerly divided him from his old opponents. He was bound to say that he deeply regretted that ... those who, while united, had conquered the foes of liberty, should have allowed the bigots among them to hatch a quarrel, which should end in uniting with those whom they most disliked, in order to spite those with whom they differed the least.' C.W.C.: Broadsides

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less significant cause of Williams's defeat was an unusual amount of treating by the conservatives, and in contrast, Williams's attempt to move closer to electoral purity by substituting 'one great party rendezvous' at the Half Moon for widespread drinking throughout the city; many publicans in consequence opposed him.(1)

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(2) cont.
Collection, Mr. Ellice's Closing Address, July 1847. The denunciation of bad liberal organisation in Coventry Herald, 30 July, 6 August 1847, was an oblique reference to underlying disputes and to the committees' failure to whip in the crucial few hundred votes needed for Williams: 'Though the great body of our constituency is liberal, it has some very disobedient members - a Chartist arm, a Nonconformist leg, and etc., and it is without a practical well-informed and directing head'.

(1) Coventry Herald, 30 July, 6 August 1847. Coventry Watchman, 7 September, 21 September 1850. At the next meeting of the White Horse Operative Conservative Association Williams's attack on bribery was derided, and the Conservatives' wider use of it at this election praised, by William Wilmot; he thought it would be wrong if a freeman could not have 5s., a quart of ale, or a plate of victuals, in compensation for loss of time. Coventry Standard, 4 February 1848. Wilmot's euphemistic description of cash payments as 'compensation' was usual in Coventry down to the 1880s: see the report of the mayor's speech in Coventry Electoral Purity League: Report of Public Meeting ... (Coventry, 1887), p. 6. Acceptance of this euphemism was presumably why Troughton and Joseph Parkes denied in 1835 that cash bribery existed in Coventry, though Parkes added that there prevailed there 'the most systematic treating I have ever known ... and the best managed'; 'buttered ale' was the local speciality. P.P.: H.C. 547 (1835) viii, pp. 60 et seq, 91. In the 1880s corruption was still widespread in both parliamentary and municipal elections, though less so than earlier in the century: Coventry Electoral Purity League ..., pp. 2 et seq. But NB that in the 1847 election there was no mention of violence or intimidation, which now seems to have died completely. The merest shadow of it was Councillor Scampton's refusal to allow Richard Bourne to leave his post as engine-man at the Swanswell Water Works to vote, when he declined to vote for Leigh, the Liberal candidate for North Warwickshire. The fuss that Wilmot and Eld made about this incident is an indication of its uniqueness. Coventry Standard, 20 August 1847.

V

The Triumph of Liberalism, 1848-1860

One striking characteristic of the years after about 1847 or 1848 was a diminution of the religious animosities which had previously divided (though in a muddled and indirect way) Tory from radical and radicals from each other. Most importantly, abuse of the alleged 'infidelity' of the Coventry Mechanics' Institution by the Anglican Coventry Religious and Useful Knowledge Society (which had always been far more usual than attacks by the mechanics' institution on its Anglican counterpart) ceased in 1849. In the early 1850s both societies were concerned over the inadequacy of resources and membership. Their amalgamation, proposed by Lord Leigh in October 1854, was backed by both committees and ratified in December: the new body adopted, significantly, the mechanics' institutions non-doctrinal stance.(1)

More spectacular was the willingness of certain Anglicans in these years to make use of dissenting support to humiliate their vicar: an indication that doctrinal differences were becoming for some less important than personal grounds. This alliance - impossible to conceive in the 1830s - arose in opposition to the Rev. J.D. Collisson, who became vicar of St. Michael's in 1846 and soon made himself unpopular. Abel Rotherham, the Anglican draper, said that from the first Collisson had treated him, a parishioner of thirty years' standing, with the 'most supercilious contempt'.(2) Rotherham got on badly with everybody, but in this instance many Anglicans agreed with him. Collisson had 'an unhappy propensity

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(1) Coventry Standard, 10 November 1848, 26 October 1849, 31 October 1851, 9 September 1853, 6 October, 27 October, 22 December 1854.

(2) Coventry Standard, 20 April 1849.

to quarrel with everybody he came into contact with'.(1) An intensely acrimonious correspondence with his curate - whom he accused of spreading rumours to the effect that he was angling for preferment, was published in the press.(2) He was lazy, never visiting more than one sick person a week when he was in the parish, and in fact spending many months of each year from 1846 onwards in Paris or Brighton. He lived no nearer than Leamington, saying that he could not get a house in a healthy position in Coventry and that residence in that insalubrious city 'might be fatal for a member of his family'.(3) During the cholera epidemic of 1849 he left the city hurriedly (for Paris) on the grounds that he was suffering from fatigue and could not have stopped the epidemic if he stayed. This action led a meeting of parishioners to hurl charges of cowardice at him, and, on Abel Rotherham's motion, to pass resolutions thanking the curate for the 'kindly and fearless manner' in which he had tended the sick when left in charge of the parish, expressing the 'severest censure' of Collisson, and deciding to petition Parliament to deprive of his living any incumbent who deserted his parish in time of danger. Copies of the resolution were sent to the bishop. These were of course without effect, but when his curate left in 1857 the church-wardens and thirty-five vestrymen gave him a testimonial for his hard work as 'the senior resident clergyman of St. Michael's'.(4)

Collisson thus did nothing during his incumbency to make himself liked, and within months of his coming to St. Michael's had become so hated that a group of parishioners devised a plan for his drastic humiliation. He was paid (as his predecessors had been since 1779) by a local act that provided for an income of not less than £300 per annum, to be raised by rates not exceeding 1s. in the pound on properties rated at £10 or more, and 6d. in the £ on properties between £6 and £10.(5) From the passing of the act until

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(1) Coventry Standard, 27 May 1853.

(2) Coventry Standard, 13 February 1857.

(3) Coventry Standard, 18 April, 2 May 1856, 23 January, 6 February 1857. The Pastoral Aid Society's grant towards the stipend of a scripture reader, and the Curate's Aid Society's grant of £80 a year, for the stipend of a second curate, were withdrawn in 1856 because of Collisson's non-residence. ibid., 18 April, 19 September 1856.

(4) Coventry Standard, 5 April 1850, 20 February 1857.

(5) 19 Geo. III, cap. 60.

March 1847 the rates had been levied by four assessors nominated by the vicar: the maximum rates were customarily levied and thus yielded £1800 a year. In March 1847 three of the four churchwardens decided to use their powers, under the 28th clause of the act (never before employed) to declare a rate themselves and to pay Collisson the minimum stipend he was entitled to; they declared rates of 3d. and 1½d. - one-quarter of the usual amount - and decided to bank the £130 this would produce in addition to the £300 needed for the stipend. George Eld and Abel Rotherham led the Anglicans who pressed ahead with this plan; they were supported, in a strange alliance, by the dissenting radicals Buckney and Taunton and, particularly, John Gordon, the Unitarian minister. For four years the churchwardens' rate was levied and a cheque for £300 offered to Collisson - churchwarden Dodd going out of his way in 1848 to add insult to injury by saying 'You may have it in sovereigns if you like'.(1) Collisson refused the money on each occasion and by April 1850 there was £1200 in the bank - three years' rates. Collisson was supported by William Wilmot and Charles Woodcock, who although they do not seem to have liked him deprecated the insult offered to an Anglican clergyman. Collisson and his supporters interpreted the act to mean that the 28th clause (not involved since Easter 1780) could not now be used by the churchwardens, whose rate was thus illegal. Collisson therefore proposed to continue to appoint assessors to levy the vicar's rate, and held a meeting each spring from 1847 to 1850 for this purpose. In 1847 ratepayers were faced with demands for two lots of rates. At least two paid the vicar's assessors' rate and were then prosecuted for not paying the other; the magistrates found against them, but further proceedings were stopped, by agreement between the solicitors H.C. Lea (acting for the churchwardens) and William Wilmot (acting for the vicar) until the case could be tried as a test action. Collisson then made no further attempt to collect the rate and his meetings to appoint assessors in 1848, 1849 and 1850 were for propaganda purposes only: which did not prevent their being interrupted by moderate and courteous speeches from John Gordon and wild, rude ones from Abel Rotherham. The action was tried in the Court of Queen's Bench in May 1850; Lord Chief Justice Campbell found for the churchwardens. With the £300 Collisson had to be

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(1) Coventry Standard, 28 April 1848.

content till he left St. Michael's in 1858.(1)

The victory of Eld and Rotherham would not have been possible without dissenting support. But the dissenters showed even less inclination to fight the Anglicans when they would have been united against them (over, that is, rates for the stipend of Holy Trinity's vicar and for the upkeep of the fabric of the churches) than they had done in the 1830s and 1840s. Meetings at times protested against them, but the few occasions when dissenters carried their opposition to the support of a state church to the extent of refusing to pay the rate - as Edward Goode and two other nonconformists did in 1854, in respect of one payment only, however, as a token act of defiance - were considered important enough for the newspapers to headline their accounts of the court proceedings for distraint that followed.(2) And within the nonconformist ranks, the question which had in 1847 divided them - state versus voluntary education - was largely healed. In 1850 a meeting that debated the question rejected the voluntaryist case still put forward by Gordon and Sibree and decided to found a Public School Association (on the model of the association founded in Manchester in 1847) to press for unsectarian elementary education, with a large element of state provision and support. The voluntaryists were thenceforth an inconsiderable group in the city.(3)

This decline in religious animosities was no doubt in part a distant reflection of the growing prosperity of the ribbon trade after 1847 and 1848 - of the strength of the list of prices and increased earnings for weavers and masters. This economic buoyancy also helped to produce a calm political climate in the city. There was less political controversy than in the 1840s, and even more than in that decade, political alignments cut across the divisions of class.(4) Working-class and middle-class radicals

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(1) Coventry Standard, 9 April, 16 April 1847, 11 February, 18 February, 31 March, 14 April, 28 April, 5 May 1848, 13 April, 20 April 1849, 5 April, 31 May, 14 June 1850.

(2) Coventry Standard, 15 December 1854, 20 April 1855, 26 June 1857, 29 January, 9 April 1858, 10 June 1859, 16 March 1860. Coventry Herald, 20 April 1855, 1 April 1858.

(3) Coventry Herald and Coventry Standard, 22 March 1850. Charles Bray, David Buckney and W.H. Gardner were active in the new association.

(4) The Crimean War aroused more political passion than any other event in the decade: though the cryptic sources suggest that the object of attack was (as elsewhere) 'aristocratic' incompetence, not middle-class power. Hartopp, Farn, John Warden and Thomas Maclean (four old Chartists) addressed in January 1855 a 'large meeting of

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were united. The National Charter Association maintained a shadowy existence in the city and expressed, fitfully, the idea that working-class and middle-class interests were opposed: but its strength was slight and it made little impact on the city - although, significantly, one of the very few members whose name is known was Richard Hartopp, the Foleshill ribbon weaver who late in the decade was the most articulate defender of the weavers in their deep quarrel with the ribbon masters.(1) What is striking about other former Chartists in the 1850s is that they joined with more moderate radicals to whom previously they had been opposed - in the advocacy of a programme much less advanced than the Six Points.

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(4) cont.
the workihg classes' in St. Mary's Hall to protest against the mismanagement of the Crimean War and to support Roebuck's motion for a select committee. A resolution urging the Queen to abolish the purchase of commissions was also carried. Warden wrote to the city's M.P.s; Ellice refused to vote for a select committee; Paxton did. The agitation was short-lived. Two lectures by R.G. Gammage on the war in June aroused little interest. Coventry radicals turned up in force to hear David Urquhart advance his anti-Palmerstonian conspiracy theories in August but made clear their disagreement with him - as Taunton did, though he agreed to take the chair. Coventry Herald, 26 January, 2 February, 16 February 1855. Coventry Standard, 26 January, 9 February, 6 July, 17 August 1855. Coventry Times, 4 July 1855.

(1) Other known members of this 'Chartist' group were Thomas Pickard and Cornelius Ashby, a weaver. In August 1851 a small number heard Ernest Jones talk on Greyfriars Green on the need for working-class solidarity against middle-class oppression, but when a year later Finlen, the Chartist, expressed on the same spot his willingness to stand for Parliament at the general election, he received no backers and retired before the nomination. A year later Jones returned, and with Ashby in the chair, addressed a numerous meeting in St. Mary's Hall on the 'existence of an antagonism between capital and labour'. A petition for the People's Charter was adopted. (Coventry Standard, 22 July 1853). A few months later Ashby, Hartopp and Jones spoke again in St. Mary's Hall 'on the general subject of human rights and with comminatory allusions to the principle of French Socialism'. There was loud applause for Jones's idea of a Labour Parliament 'composed of the collective mind of the country, to perfect such a rational organisation of all trades and societies of working men ... by calm discussion to solve that great social problem of the relative duties of labour and capital' (ibid., 3 February 1854). Other activities of the group were collecting money in the city for Feargus O'Connor's memorial in 1855, and welcoming John Frost (transported after the Newport Rising) when he visited Coventry in 1857. Twenty-four self-styled Chartists met at their old haunt, the George Inn, in 1859, to protest against the inadequacy of Derby's reform bill. For this section, see apart from the references given, Coventry Standard, 29 August 1851, 12 October 1855, 30 January 1857. Coventry Herald, 2 July 1852, 11 March 1859. Coventry Times, 12 December 1855. Coventry Weekly Times, 28 January, 30 December 1857. For Hartopp's involvement in the great labour dispute of the late 1850s, see Chapter Eleven.

The new move began with the reception given in June 1848 to Joseph Hume's 'Little Charter' - with its demand for household suffrage, triennial parliaments and some redistribution of seats. J. Sibley Whittem and Charles Bray - both Anti Corn Law Leaguers opposed to Chartism earlier in the decade - were leading supporters.(1) So was David Buckney - who now thought that universal suffrage would not work well in Coventry, since the wide local electorate had returned the Tory Turner. And so, most significantly, were J.C. Farn and Pritchard, who had stayed on the Chartist course longer than Buckney and who had spoken a few months earlier at the last large Chartist meetings in the city in April. But they backed the 'Little Charter', they said, 'without prejudice' to their wish to see the greater one carried into law.(2)

In the spring of 1849 the 'Little Charter' group(3) formed, with others of like mind, the Coventry Financial and Parliamentary Reform Association to press for household suffrage, the reduction of governmental expenditure and a higher rate of income-tax on

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(1) But Bray thought sanitary reform was as important as the extension of the suffrage. See Chapter Ten for a discussion of Bray's attitudes as revealed in his editorship of the Coventry Herald.

(2) Coventry Herald and Coventry Standard, 9 June 1848. John Gordon, the unitarian minister, also announced at the June meeting his support of Hume's movement; he too declared that he continued to be in favour of the People's Charter - except annual parliaments, which he had always disliked. He would also have wished to add another point if it were feasible - a republican instead of a monarchical constitution. But the sources do not reveal his active support of Chartism earlier in the decade. To Whittem's letter, after the June meeting, asking for support, Turner replied with a straight refusal and Ellice with typical ambiguity: 'I am afraid it will not be in my power to support the views of ... Mr. Hume, to the extent of his proposition. We do not disagree, however, in principle ... I am perfectly ready to concur in such progress in further improvement, as unnecessary and inexpedient restrictions in the Suffrage, and the anomalies left by the Reform Bill, may from time to time require, and may not appear inconsistent with the safety and maintenance of the social institutions of the country.' Coventry Standard, 16 June, 30 June 1848.

(3) Except Pritchard, not afterwards mentioned.

unearned than earned income - a conjunction of the programmes of Cobden and Bright.(1) The association (usually called the Reform Association) was the most active radical group in Coventry throughout the 1850s. Its members were described as the 'more intelligent and comfortably circumstanced of the working-class, with a tolerable sprinkling of the middle-class'.(2) The list of known members on p.356 mentions far more of the 'sprinkling' than of the others. Our ignorance of these is no doubt due in part to the natural inclination of the press to name solid citizens rather than simple weavers or watchmakers: but more importantly, it reflects the singular failure of working men to thrust themselves forward, in any sense. The association had a complex constitution, providing for the election of the general committee by district branches.(3) In fact, real power was held by a small group of five affluent middle-class citizens - J.S. Whittem (the currier), Henry Browett (ribbon manufacturer), Zephaniah A. Binley (chemist and druggist),

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(1) Coventry Herald, 25 May 1849. The unfairness of the income-tax in pressing equally upon those with unreliable incomes from trades and professions as it did upon the assured rent-rolls of landowners had been ventilated at a meeting in Coventry in February 1848, to protest at the government's proposal to raise the tax to 5%. The meeting was an all-party one and the unfairness argument was put most forcefully by W. Lynes, a leading Conservative ribbon-master. Radicals present agreed with him but aroused anger among Conservatives by attacking the effects of government policies on the working class. George Hemming attacked the laws of primogeniture and entail. John Warden thought the new income-tax proposals would harm the poor by causing the dismissal of servants: 'He thought the present government should take notice of Louis Philippe, what the public voice had done there, for he had crippled the liberties of the people and they had hauled him down from his throne. (Cries of "Question")'. Whittem, Gordon, Farn, Taunton and Thomas Robinson argued that the army ought to be cut down to enable taxation to be reduced - and Sibree added that he regretted the absence from the meeting of Anglican clergymen. ('Question') Charles Bray agreed with those who wanted distinctions between precarious and fixed incomes but deprecated the widespread demand for an overall reduction in taxation: 'unless we agreed to be taxed to make our government respectable, we should come down to a ... third-rate state, like Holland, or a fourth-rate, like the Chinese'. This was another phase of Bray's quarrel with nonconformity in the city. Coventry Herald, and Coventry Standard, 3 March 1848.

(2) Coventry Herald, 9 May 1851.

(3) Coventry Herald, 9 May 1851.

List of known members of the Coventry Financial and Parliamentary Reform Association, with their professions, 1850-1859.

J. Amos	ribbon manufacturer	R. Hands	dyer
A. Atkins	grocer	N. Hill	watch manufacturer
J.S. Beamish	bookseller,stationer	T. Hill	watch manufacturer
A. Bill	ribbon manufacturer	W.H. Hill	watch manufacturer
Z.A. Binley	chemist and druggist	T. Hind	?
C. Bray	ribbon manufacturer	W. Hosier	weaver (?)
H. Browett	ribbon manufacturer	T. Jenkins	chemist & druggist
J. Browett	draper	-. Leavesley	dyer (?)
T. Browett	solicitor	A. McMillan	travelling draper
W.H. Browett	draper	J. Marriott	surveyor & builder
S. Brown	ribbon manufacturer	W.H. Marston	pawnbroker
T. Brown	watch manufacturer	W.H. Mercer	ribbon manufacturer
D. Buckney	ribbon manufacturer	T. Mattocks	weaver
N. Buckley	ribbon manufacturer	H. Newsome	ribbon manufacturer
R. Caldicott jr.	ribbon manufacturer	J. Olorenshaw	watch manufacturer
J. Cash	ribbon manufacturer	J. Perkins	ribbon manufacturer
J.C. Farn	newsagent	T. Perkins	ribbon manufacturer
John Flinn	watch manufacturer	T. Ransford	grocer
C. Freeman	coal dealer	C. Read	watch manufacturer
D. Gardner	builder	W. Read	watch manufacturer
W.H. Gardner	grocer	J. Scampton	grocer
E. Goode	bookseller, stationer	H. Soden	ribbon manufacturer
N. Goodridge	secretary to Freehold Land Society	W. Spencer	ribbon manufacturer
J. Gordon	unitarian minister	W. Taunton	houseagent, etc.
J. Gulson	silkman	J. Warden	plumber
J. Hands	watchmaker	J.S. Whittem	currier

Notes: (1) The sources of the list are Coventry Standard, 1 February, 23 August 1850, 10 October 1851, 25 June 1852, 10 November, 24 November, 1 December 1854, 23 July 1857, 20 May 1859; Coventry Herald, 10 October 1851, 9 July 1852, 11 March 1859. Details of occupations have been drawn from the directories of Whiteand Lascalles.

(2) The occupations given are those followed in the decade in question. Some members are known to have followed different ones earlier or later: for example, Edward Goode, William Taunton and Charles Bray.

(3) The list in its entirety does not purport to describe the membership at any precise point in the decade. Only about half the men here listed are known to have been members of the association throughout these ten years.

William H. Hill (watch manufacturer) and James Marriott (builder and surveyor).(1) Whether they were elected or not is not clear and in a sense unimportant; members acquiesced in their power. In addition, though the list of known members includes the names of men who had previously been active Chartists - Buckney, Farn, Taunton - they now in the 1850s seemed (despite the wish that Farn had expressed in 1848) to take their lead from those members - Bray, Goode, Whittem - who had long been opposed to manhood suffrage. Thus for many years there was no hint in the association of any pressure for the immediate extension of the franchise more widely than to householders.(2)

In fact, only one discussion on the question is recorded: in 1859, in reaction to Derby's abortive reform bill. The association called a public meeting in the Corn Exchange. Charles Flint, the chairman, denounced the bill as a sham and called for the ballot and a wider franchise. Thomas Read, the factory weaver, agreed with him. John Farn attacked the bill for weighting the landed interest against that of the manufacturing and commercial classes. 'He asserted the superiority of the weavers and watchmakers of Coventry to farmers, on the ground that the former did not abuse him when he went canvassing, but the latter did.'(3) Sir Joseph Paxton, M.P. for the borough, said that he would like to see a franchise for all Britain like Coventry's freemen, which being interpreted, meant household suffrage - the demand (with the ballot and triennial parliaments) of the resolution proposed by the Rev. T. Goadby. There were frequent shouts and interruptions throughout

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(1) Coventry Standard, 8 December 1854. The Standard referred to this group as 'the junta'. Joseph Parkes called it 'the caucus': National Library of Scotland, Ellice Papers, E38/141, Parkes to Ellice, 8 November 1854. I have derived the occupations of the five from Lascelles' Directory. J.S. Whittem revealed his feelings on the franchise question in a letter to Edward Ellice, 27 December 1858 (Ellice Papers E 57/64). On parliamentary reform: 'I dread such a measure from Ld. Derby because I very much fear that he may give a very extended suffrage, but so shuffle the cards as to lessen the influence of the middle class rather than increase it. Not that I want any exclusive class legislation. I want every class fairly represented. Universal suffrage would I believe favor Tory rule as it does that of Louis Napoleon's ... My opinions on the extension of the suffrage question have been of late much modified by the experience of our municipal elections - they are acquiring a very Yankee character.' Whittem went on to explain that he meant by this the recent election of William Wilmot, the Tory populist, ('such a creature') as mayor. 'Can you believe that not a liberal voice was raised in protest against such a disgrace? ... Nothing of a local character within my experience has occurred so thoroughly disgusting and degrading I think to the liberal party.'

(2) For the reform association see, besides thesources quoted, Coventry Standard, 1 February, 8 February, 16 August, 23 August 1850,

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these discourses; they came from a group of working men led by Thomas Pickard and Richard Hartopp, the loyal Chartists. At length, Pickard and Hartopp, praising the intelligence of the working class, called for manhood suffrage. The comment of the Standard was that 'the promoters of the affair were destined to experience the fate of Frankenstein - in calling the meeting they had created a monster they could not control'.(1) In fact, the monster was small enough to be easily controllable. The 'Chartist' motion was withdrawn and Goadby's passed.(2) The meeting was held at a time when the weavers were in the middle of their attempt to grasp industrial power by imposing piece-work on all ribbon factories: yet there was no significant demand for it to be accompanied by political power.

In membership and underlying aim the reform association overlapped considerably with the Coventry Freehold Land Society - an important focus of radical activity in these years, and characteristic of them in embodying a displacement into modes of self-help of energies previously spent on direct political action.(3) The

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(2) cont.
10 October 1851, 26 March 1852. Coventry Herald, 8 February 1850, 10 October 1851.
(3) Coventry Standard, 18 March 1859.

(1) Coventry Standard, loc. cit.
(2) See also Coventry Herald, 18 March 1859, for this affair. 3000 men signed the petition for household suffrage, the ballot, and triennial parliaments, that issued from this meeting. Coventry Standard, 25 March 1859.
(3) Apart from the FLS, radical involvement is most apparent in the Labourers' and Artisans' Friend Society - which though founded in 1842 began to grow greatly about 1850 - and in the building society movement, prospering in these years. After the early success of the Hare and Squirrel Society (founded 1845) the Coventry Building Society was founded a year later, John Warden being one of its leading members. In 1847 Buckney and Rushton began the Loan and Land Association (to provide cottages for artisans at a density of five per acre, to permit large gardens). The Coventry Union Building Society started in 1848 - owing to, it was said, the success of the others. All these societies were on the termination principle. The first permanent society - the Benefit - was founded in 1849, largely by Arthur Atkins, the Quaker radical, and the Equitable in 1853. Coventry Standard, 29 October 1847, 10 March 1848, 2 November, 28 December 1849, 31 October 1856, 4 December 1857. Coventry Herald, 30 April 1847, 24 March 1848, 7 January 1853. By 1850 Buckney's society had ended - apparently being merged with the FLS - but the others were booming, with nearly 1000 members between them. Of course, in the 'self-help' movement as a whole the energies of conservatives as well as of radicals (and of those who were neither) were involved: and it represented at least as much a function of growing prosperity as a substitution of social purpose. Thus the Savings Bank and the friendly societies were booming in the early 1850s: in 1851 there were over 60 of the latter, mostly to

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land society was founded in June 1848, as an extension of the Birmingham society of the same name. George Dawson of Birmingham visited Coventry to start it. The society's intention was to purchase land to be split into freehold plots for members. Capital for the estates came from members' savings - at least 1s.6d. a week being paid for each share. The streets were to be made up by the society; members could choose to erect houses on their plots, or cultivate them as gardens. It was not necessary to purchase a plot outright to obtain possession; members might get one by saving so much by way of deposit and mortgaging the plot, for the balance, to the society. The unencumbered freehold would, however, become the member's in five or six years and since the plots were to have a clear annual value of 40s. they might then gain the county franchise - the whole object of the scheme being indeed the extension of radicalism through the direct effect of, and the good reputation gained by, systematic thrift.(1) 'He would have them', said John Read (a weaver and member) 'manifest a disposition so earnest and so diligent, that everyone would be compelled to acknowledge the desert, at the same time that they would be obliged to allow the possession'.(2) C.H. Bracebridge of Atherstone was

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(3) cont.
provide sickness benefit; most were small societies based on the clientele of public houses, but J.S. Whittem's Provident Society had 340 members. The Provident Dispensary (of which Charles Bray was Secretary and inspiration) was also growing: its aim was to provide the prudential, subscribing poor with medical treatment that was in part subsidised. Also, the growth of mutual improvement societies (there were seven in the city by 1852, with a combined membership of over 200, applying themselves to reading, recitations, secular and religious discussions, and the consumption of tea and coffee) stood in contrast to the comparative lack of positive educational effort in the two mechanics' institutions at the same time. This protean movement was celebrated, in a series of articles in the Coventry Herald, by Charles Bray, who saw it as the replacement of ignorant fecklessness and unwarranted and wild political ambition among working men by prudence, thrift and self-education - all recipes for personal happiness and, in the fulness of time, the privilege of political power. Coventry Herald, 4 October, 18 October, 25 October 1850, 15 August 1851, 29 October 1852. See also Coventry Standard, 9 May 1851. Joseph Gutteridge, op. cit., pp. 84, 111 et seq gives details of the intellectually rigorous programme of the Coventry Mutual Improvement Society (the largest in the city) in the 1850s. Bray, J.C. Farn and George Hall were members.

(1) The Coventry society claimed the franchise for more than 20 mortgagee members on its Stoke estate in 1851; the watchful William Wilmot, appearing for the Conservatives at the Revising Barristers' court, succeeded in getting their names struck off the register because their annual payments reduced the annual value of their plots to less than 40s. Coventry Standard, 21 November 1851.
(2) Coventry Herald, 9 August 1850.

the president of the Coventry society; prominent members were Charles Bray, W.H. Browett, David Buckney, B.S. Richardson (one-time Socialist missionary), W.H. Hill, Zephaniah A. Binley, J.S. Beamish, Edward Goode, John Warden, Thomas Banbury and David Smith. It thus provided, like the reform association, a vehicle for the united talents of diverse radicals who had been at loggerheads in the early 1840s. The society grew rapidly. In April 1849 there were 300 members, with 402 shares between them. Eighteen months later there were 500, with more than 700 shares, and in August 1851 nearly 900 members. By the end of 1852 £13,500 had been subscribed.

The supply of plots could not keep pace with the demand for them. The first estate, of 3½ acres at Geoffrey Wood's Cross provided in April 1849 29 allotments for members who paid £20 each for them. The site was a former brickyard and on settlement day, when it poured with rain, it reminded a hostile Conservative witness of the New Eden that Martin Chuzzlewit had been gulled into buying land in. Even so, a few years later many freeholders had erected houses there - doubling the value of their land in the process. The second estate was at Stoke: South Street and Coventry Street were laid out on 50 acres, and 256 plots provided in August 1850; settlement was celebrated by a rural fete and the roasting of a bullock and two sheep. Later, there was disappointment, since the roadworks had been shoddy and the streets became a sea of mud: nevertheless, the demand for plots at the following estates was so great that the original method of choosing plotholders - apparently by simple rotation, with the earlest subscribers getting their plots first - proved inadequate, and a ballot was substituted for later estates. These consisted of 30 acres in Earlsdon, from which Cromwell, Arden, Clarendon, Moore and Warwick Streets, and 250 plots, were made in 1852; about 10 acres near the Stoney Stanton Road, from which Stanton, George, Charles, Howard, Byron, Jenner and Russell Streets were made in 1853 (and on which 70 weavers' cottages were immediately built); and 16 acres near Ford Street. Tenders were invited for the design of this estate - the Spittalmoor; 29 plans were received and the one submitted by Ashwell, the superintendent of Coventry cemetery, was chosen. Raglan and Alma Streets were laid out in 1856. This was the last estate; the slump in the ribbon trade at the end of 1854 had caused some subscribers to withdraw their savings but a year later the society was again prosperous - receiving more than £3000 in subscriptions in 1855. The underlying reasons for the end of the society in

its original form appear to have been the increasing difficulty of obtaining land at a satisfactory price, and the difficulty of proving title so that plotholders could be registered as voters in the teeth of Conservative opposition in the revision courts. These problems seem to have made the enterprise not worth the trouble - especially since there was ample opportunity for artisans who merely wanted an allotment to cultivate to rent one from the Labourers' and Artisans' Friend Society. The society became a conventional building society in 1855 and gave up its political aims and the purchase of land for estates.(1)

The constant Conservative majority in the Northern Division of Warwickshire could not be significantly dented by the creation of a few hundred freehold plots by the Coventry Land Society. But the overwhelmingly liberal complexion of the city itself is shown by the fact that the rival Conservative society - the Coventry and North and South Warwickshire Land, Building and Investment Association, 'to enable the industrious working man to save to buy a 40s. freehold by not less than 1s.6d. per week' - which was started in 1849 with the backing of some of the most weighty Conservatives in the town - Thomas Cope, R.K. Rotherham, William Lynes and T.S. Morris - was stillborn.(2) In these years, indeed, Conservatism was constantly on the defensive. Above all the prosperity that followed Corn Law repeal helped to cause a decline in protectionist sentiment among those who had been its most tenacious supporters in the city. At the annual meeting of the White Horse Operative Conservative Association in 1848 Wilmot lamented repeal: 'I believe that the poor were better off when they had high wages and high prices'.(3) A year later, to toasts to the glories of Trafalgar and the Church of England (and against Popery and Puritanism) he

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(1) For the FLS, see C.W.C.: Pamphlets Collection: Reports of the Committee of the Coventry Freehold Land Society, 1851-2, and 1854-5. Coventry Herald, 7 July, 6 October, 8 December 1848, 5 April, 20 April, 22 June, 10 August 1849, 9 August, 4 October, 18 October 1850, 10 January, 31 January, 15 August, 22 August 1851, 23 April, 13 August, 15 October 1852, 5 August 1853, 28 April, 1 September 1854. Coventry Standard, 6 October, 13 October 1848, 5 April 1849, 15 March, 9 August 1850, 5 March, 16 April, 4 June, 27 August 1852, 3 June, 7 October, 21 October, 16 December 1853, 9 February, 16 February, 30 March, 24 August 1855, 20 March, 2 May 1856. Many other freehold land societies became building societies in the mid-1850s, for similar reasons: see E.J. Cleary, The Building Society Movement (London, 1965), pp. 52 et seq.

(2) Coventry Standard, 5 April 1849. Subscribers to this society made payments at the CRUKS - a reflection of the political alignment of that body.

(3) Coventry Standard, 4 February 1848.

predicted that free trade in corn would lead to the sale of land and a republican constitution.(1) Early in 1850 he was agreeing with the Earl of Warwick and Charles N. Newdegate, at the dinner of the Coventry and Warwickshire Association for the Protection of British Industry, that the fortunes of ribbons and corn were inextricably linked: the silk trade and agriculture must fight together to restore the Corn Laws, and so prevent the ruin of the market for ribbons among farmers' wives and daughters. But a few weeks later he could say nothing when at the White Horse dinner W. Lynes pointed out that Parliament and people could not be brought to agree to the return of agricultural protection.(2) By 1851 the chairman of the White Horse Association, John Clarke (a first-hand weaver) went out of his way to express his gratitude for cheap bread and to praise both Ellice and Turner, who had approved of repeal; he thought protection was dead for bread grains, though perhaps there was a case for a duty on oats that would raise agricultural profits and yet not the price of food - and of course the protective tariffs on ribbons had to stay. Wilmot did not discuss the protection question, and merely argued strongly for a reduction of the tea duty (to help the working man), a differential income-tax as between precarious and fixed incomes (to help tradesmen and solicitors) and a stronger Ecclesiastical Titles Bill (to help Protestants).(3) When another year had passed he grudgingly admitted that the poor profited from the fact that flour was cheaper than it had been before repeal - though not cheap enough, and he wanted the assize of bread returned to regulate it closely.(4) By 1853 he admitted openly that he knew the Corn Laws could not be restored.(5)

Wilmot's reluctant and evasive recognition that the Corn Laws had gone for ever was accompanied, for the great majority of Coventrians, by grateful thanks for their disappearance: as was shown by the public response to William Taunton's suggestion that a statue of Peel be erected; at the meeting to arrange it a speech by one Henry Candy attacking free trade as good for capitalists but bad for the poor caused uproar and cries that he had been sent by

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(1) ibid., 16 February 1849.

(2) Coventry Standard, 18 January, 1 March 1850.

(3) Coventry Standard, 21 February 1851.

(4) ibid., 20 February 1852.

(5) ibid., 11 February 1853. See Thomas Paine's remarks, quoted in Section II of this chapter, for diehard Tory protectionism in the late 1840s.

Wilmot.(1) At the bye-election in April 1851(2) the candidate of the Ellice men - the old blues, as they were still called - put forward Edward Strutt, a member of the Derbyshire family of millowners. Abijah Hill Pears and David Smith - ribbon manufacturer and ribbon weaver - were leading men on his committee. In his address and speeches Strutt argued for the ballot, some extension of the franchise and improvements in national provision for elementary education and, despite his support of civil and religious liberty, the Ecclesiastical Titles Bill, because he was opposed to 'papal aggression'. He made most of his support of free trade in food, however, parading with a dark blue flag that pictured a large loaf bearing the words 'Free Trade' and a small loaf inscribed 'Protection'. His opponent, Alderman Edward Geach of Birmingham, a banker, was brought forward at the last minute by the Parliamentary and Financial Reform Association because the old blues did not consult them about Strutt and they regarded him as too tepid on the franchise question. Geach regretted the split in the liberal ranks but wanted household suffrage and eventually manhood suffrage when 'intelligence was fully diffused'.(3) He also opposed the Ecclesiastical Titles Bill as an attempt to infringe religious liberty. He agreed with Strutt on the education and free trade questions, however. In a quiet election without a Tory candidate there were 1400 unpolled electors. Geach won by 1669 votes to 1104.(4)

In the general election of a year later the Tories tried harder. Ellice they did not attack; their aim was to detach the radicals (the pinks (5)) from the 'Whigs' (the old blues) - by denigrating Geach and gaining the second votes of Ellice's supporters for a Conservative candidate. His alleged praise of Louis Napoleon was raked up. His opposition to the Ecclesiastical Titles Bill and his support of 'national education' were stressed, to turn Anglicans and nonconformist voluntaryists against him.

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(1) ibid., 19 July, 26 July 1850.

(2) Caused by the promotion of Turner to the post of Vice-Chancellor in the Court of Chancery. See D.N.B.

(3) Coventry Standard, 11 April 1851.

(4) Coventry Standard, 4 April, 11 April 1851. Coventry Herald, 4 April, 11 April 1851.

(5) Pink was now the radical colour in Coventry.

As to Religious Liberty, it is notorious that Mr. Geach's notions carry him to a degree of generosity on this point, that he will permit the Pope of Rome and his minions to beard the Queen on her Throne, and set the laws of the land at defiance ... On the subject of Education, Mr. Geach stands in connexion with those who, having ignored all religious teaching, would impose another compulsory Municipal Tax for the support of Schools, for which Socialists and Anythingarians should be the Directors. [Geach went] hand in glove with those leading political quacks, Cobden and Bright ... he belongs to that monster confederation of Cotton Lords and Capitalists who subscribed their thousand pounds a minute for the infamous purpose of swamping the freedom and independence of constituencies wholesale by the power of money ... He is attached to the Extension of the Franchise School, the grand aim of which is to swamp all the Old Class of Voters, and to substitute one universal rule in favour of the occupancy of 'a house or part of a house', and the ultimate of which must be, to extinguish the ancient and honourable franchise acquired by serving a seven years' apprenticeship, as in this City, and in a few years time, all that property and those privileges which belong to the Freemen now, will be transferred in common to strangers and ephemeral interlopers - birds of passage from all quarters.(1)

Above all, if power went to Geach and his friends, the protective duties on ribbons and watches would be swept away:

> the certain consequence of which will be to cause a large reduction of Wages ... so that the Artizans of this City, under the regimen of the Manchester School, may prepare themselves for sinking to the level of the miserable serfs of Germany and Switzerland ... Electors! Hold yourselves in readiness - do not promise your votes - a Candidate worthy your confidence, holding liberal Conservative principles; a friend of Civil and Religious Liberty, and OPPOSED TO ANY REIMPOSITION OF A DUTY ON CORN, will shortly be announced.(2)

This was John Gellibrand Hubbard, deputy governor of the Bank of England, who in his address stressed his opposition to the ballot and the impertinent encroachments of Popery (and the Maynooth Grant) and his support of the settled constitution of the country, the pre-eminence of the Church of England, the education of the masses by voluntary agencies with State grants, and above all cheap bread. He had always opposed the Corn Laws.(3)

In their election addresses both Ellice and Geach also made a great deal of their past support for the repeal of the Corn Laws, and their present desire for civil and religious liberty and national education - both these last aims being undefined. On the franchise question Geach looked forward to much more rapid advance than Ellice,

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(1) C.W.C.: Broadsides Collection, 'A Seven Years' Freeman', Mr. Geach and his Pretensions, June 1852.

(2) loc. cit; see also the Tory election pamphlet in Coventry Standard, 16 April 1852.

(3) Coventry Standard, 25 June 1852.

who spoke of the gradual extension of the suffrage, the need to ensure both that minorities as well as the majority were represented and that 'rash and ill-considered innovations' were avoided, and his wish to be allowed by his constituents 'to exercise a discretion in the practical application' of his reforming principles.(1) As the Herald put it, Ellice was 'a Reformer of a comprehensive stamp ... as cautious as a Conservative in the application of his principles, his principles themselves are sufficiently Radical'; while Geach differing from him on the one question of parliamentary reform, took on it 'if not a more extended range, probably a more decided form'.(2) Nevertheless, they had much more common ground with each other than with Hubbard.(3) Ellice's position in the constituency was so secure that he did not canvass and after a short

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(1) Coventry Standard, 18 June 1852.

(2) Coventry Herald, 18 June 1852.

(3) One old blue who did not think so was Benjamin Poole, who worked unsuccessfully in 1852 for a coalition between Ellice and Hubbard because of the common ground between them on the franchise question. 'The Five Points creed was never my creed': see his letter in Coventry Standard, 9 July 1852. Apart from his principles, Poole (a good hater, who never forgot an injury, whether real or imagined) detested the radicals for their alleged betrayals of the liberal cause at every election since 1835: loc. cit., and his letter in Coventry Watchman, 7 September 1850. Poole was almost certainly the author of C.W.C.: Broadsides Collection, 'An Old Bird', The Old Blues and the Scorpion, 28 June 1852:

> 'However the Old Blues and the Conservatives may differ upon some things, they are agreed upon one great principle - that of maintaining the British Constitution against the eternal assaults of the destructives. In times like these, it behoves all real lovers of their country to give and take in matters of detail, and to make common cause in endeavouring to uphold the institutions of the country from the sapping operations of Chartists, Radicals, and Socialists. The character and address of Mr. Hubbard shows, that the Tories, in bringing such a man, have made a long stride towards a complete approximation to the principles of the old Liberal Party. I ask them whether it is wise to repulse and repudiate such an advance? or whether the Old Liberals prefer to place the Blue Flag and Mr. Ellice in the keeping, or at the mercy of the Scorpion of Radicalism, which the Geachites are just now artfully endeavouring to thrust into the bosom of the Old Blue Party?'

visit at the end of June left Coventry for London until just before the poll - to avoid excitement, he said. He had no need of an alliance. The radicals did, approached Ellice's committee months before the contest, and had their proposals for a coalition accepted. Ellice and Geach worked together, rode in the same coach after the nomination, and attended each other's dinners - and Ellice praised Geach in his speeches.(1)

Hubbard could make no headway. In a city whose prosperity was growing his attempt to arouse fear that a precondition of that prosperity - tariffs against foreign manufacturers - would soon be removed was discounted. So were his warnings over the future of the freeman franchise. His attempt to arouse old religious passions - in a city where they were losing their force - was disliked, apparently even by some Anglicans. This seems to have been the reason for some men who had voted for Turner in 1847 now turning away from Hubbard. The nonconformists did not now feel strongly enough over the voluntary schools question to rock the liberal vote, as in 1847. Above all, though Hubbard's support for the repeal of the Corn Laws - one event that almost everybody in Coventry seems to have been thankful for - was naturally commended, liberals asked why they should not support men who had worked actively for it, and whether the presence on Hubbard's platform of old protectionists like Eld, Woodcock, Wilmot and R.K. Rotherham did not show that despite his praise of cheap bread Hubbard had changed his ideas too rapidly? Was he not 'a Derbyite of the true chameleon character'?(2) Some few Poolites, favouring an alliance between Ellice and Hubbard, raised the old blue and light blue flags together as Hubbard spoke from the balcony of the King's Head in Hertford Street. Outraged radicals tore up the light blue

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(1) National Library of Scotland: Ellice Papers: E62/109 et seq, Edward Ellice, sen. to Edward Ellice jun., 6 July 1852. Coventry Standard, 26 March, 4 June, 2 July, 9 July 1852. Coventry Herald, 2 July 1852. In return, the radicals of the Parliamentary and Financial Reform Association would have nothing to do with James Finlen, the Chartist, who spoke twice on Greyfriars Green with a view to standing for Coventry. He was attacked in a handbill by 'A Friend to Geach' who accused him of having been introduced by the Tories to injure the liberal alliance. Finlen accused the Geachites of brutalising the electorate by treating (which seems to have been extensive in this election) and of doing more harm to the liberal cause than the Tories ever did. He retired from the contest without being nominated. Coventry Herald, 2 July 1852, Coventry Standard, 2 July, 9 July 1852.

(2) Coventry Herald, 25 June 1852.

flag, disturbed Hubbard's speech with concerted uproar, paraded with a placard 'Vote for the cupboard and not for Hubbard', and displayed two loaves - a big one and a little one, the liberal and the Tory - outside the Castle Inn. Hubbard's canvassers told him that he could not win, and he withdrew before the poll.(1) Edward Ellice wrote of the contest to his son.

> All has gone off admirably. Say what they may this is the best constituency in the Empire. The people are essentially political thinkers, and talkers, from long habit and from their constant battles with the old corporation. Geach who has been most active, and has canvassed the whole constituency, says the difference between them and the Birm. men is astonishing - and their honesty and independence is equal to their intelligence ... When Hubbard went to Cope and Hammerton's warehouse, the men asked him whether the liberal masters were not respectable men, and Free traders as much as himself, and why therefore he opposed them? Only two, to Hammerton's mortification, would vote for him. The result of Geach's canvass was, that he would have beaten Hubbard by 900 - I by 2000. But Hubbard had enough ... and ran.
>
> The feeling to me has been gratifying beyond description. I never saw so much attendance - affection - and kindness in men, women, all. Whatever I said, was taken for gospel - no questions asked. When I deprecated in my speech the attempt by Church of E to revive religious discord - so far R. Catholicism, or Maynooth being thought of - there were general cheers. We had such an attendance at the Butts as I never saw before - or such a rally or procession afterwards ... The weather has been beautiful, intensely hot, and I have just come home, as if out of a warm bath.(2)

Two years later Geach died. Before he was buried the 'caucus' chose as their man Sir Joseph Paxton.(3) Henry Browett and J.S. Whittem travelled to London, and received Paxton's acceptance of the candidacy after he had telegraphed the Duke of Devonshire and gained his support. Browett and Whittem then told him not to come to Coventry till they gave him the word, since they had to consult with the dark blue (Ellicite) committee and go through the motions of considering other names in their own before rubber-stamping Paxton's nomination. Paxton's assurances on the ballot and household suffrage satisfied Browett and Whittem. But he hesitated over the question of triennial parliaments. 'Paxton thought 4 or 5 years as good or better than 3: S.W. said "Browett, damn the question"; both laughed and said it was of no moment. The fact is, that the

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(1) Coventry Standard, 25 June, 2 July, 9 July, 30 July 1852. National Library of Scotland; Ellice Papers, loc. cit.

(2) National Library of Scotland: Ellice Papers, loc. cit.

(3) Already well known in Coventry: he designed the cemetery in 1845. See G.F. Chadwick, The Works of Sir Joseph Paxton (London, 1961), p. 54.

extreme men know they can carry no man of their genus, and no pure blackguard.'(1) Paxton saw Parkes, taking a MS draft of his address, which on Parkes's advice he made less specific on the franchise question, to avoid arousing controversy among the liberals or opposition from the Tories.(2) Paxton's address was indeed perhaps the vaguest offered in the period (apart of course from some of Ellice's); it presented Paxton as a supporter of the Crimean War, and as a friend of Geach, of civil and religious liberty, of Free Trade, of franchise reform (left undefined) and of 'any measures for the improvement of the condition of the working classes'.(3)

The liberals were united. The radical caucus approved the choice of Paxton on 5 November, and an open meeting of liberals in the Craven Arms three weeks later also did, unanimously; even Charles Dresser, the ribbon manufacturer and a staunch Ellicite old blue, favoured Paxton.(4) Ellice had feared the revival of old animosities in the liberal ranks, but now believed that 'the constituency was becoming more and more decided in politics - especially at the present moment, when the only subject that interests anybody, is the war'.(5) The city's Conservatives could not find either a candidate or solid grounds on which to attack Paxton. Wilmot had now dropped his attack on Corn Law repeal but was still beating the Anglican drum; the Church was in dangor, he alleged, from Roman Catholic and Jew, and the parliamentary admission oath must not be abolished.(6) In view of Ellice's

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(1) National Library of Scotland: Ellice Papers, E38/134 et seq, Joseph Parkes to Edward Ellice sen, 4 November 1854. See also ibid., E38/140 et seq, Parkes to Ellice, 8 November 1854. Further details of Paxton's contest were settled by Whittem and Browett with Parkes when they were returning from Geach's funeral in Parkes's brougham.

(2) ibid., E38/141, Parkes to Ellice, 8 November 1854.

(3) Coventry Standard, 17 November 1854.

(4) Coventry Standard, 10 November, 1 December 1854. Sir F. Buxton, another aspirant for the radical seat, was carefully got rid of. On visiting Coventry to spy out the land 'he was surrounded and caught by the button, by some of those dexterous hands who manage things without condescending to consult the electorate, and by representations more artful than true, was induced to leave the town without making any appeal to the constituency'. Coventry Standard, 1 December 1854.

(5) National Library of Scotland: Ellice Papers, E41/242, Edward Ellice sen. to Joseph Parkes, 9 November 1854. Ellice stayed in Scotland for the contest. He referred to Paxton as 'the Gardener' but added that 'He is a very good candidate of his class'.

(6) Coventry Standard, 31 March 1854.

experience in the 1852 election the Tories were wise not to attempt to use this argument in 1854. They attacked instead the cost of his plans for National Education (though Paxton had not in fact spelled these out), his alleged lukewarmness over a Ten Hours Bill (though since he had not been an M.P. or spoken much about the question they had very little to go on), the extortionate fee he had been paid for laying out Coventry cemetery (£300), and the iniquity perpetrated by some 'Radical Roughs ... compared with whom the Spanish Inquisition was a pure body' in breaking the windows of the Craven Arms while the Conservatives were meeting there.(1) Tory handbills argued that Coventry deserved a better man than one who had been knighted by the Czar in 1844, and who had merely the design of the Crystal Palace to his credit in England. But when Hubbard wrote to Wilmot that he was willing to stand if requisitioned, the Tory leaders came reluctantly to the conclusion that he could not win. They were even more sure that another aspirant, Morgan Thomas, could not win, since he still believed in resuscitating the Corn Laws - a programme for which there was, as Wilmot admitted, absolutely no chance of support in Coventry. So Paxton alone was nominated - accompanied by Henry Browett, John Gordon, Charles Dresser and Edward Goode, showing the unity of liberal feeling - and the only Tory success was in hitting Charles Dresser on the head afterwards with a savoy cabbage taken from a market stall.(2)

The contest at the general election of 1857 was Ellice's triumph. Four other candidates stood: Paxton, John Mellor (a barrister on the Midland circuit who had previously stood for Warwick), Morgan Treherne (who as Morgan Thomas had stood for Coventry previously in 1835) and J.G. Phillimore. One chief point of controversy in the contest was the recent bombardment of Canton and Palmerston's attitude towards it. Ellice had supported Palmerston (though with reluctance) against Cobden's resolution; he said little in his address on other matters, announcing once again his support for civil and religious liberty and for the reduction of taxation. Paxton (backed by leading members of the Parliamentary and Financial Reform Association such as John Farn,

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(1) C.W.C.: Broadsides Collection, 'A £10 Householder', To the Freemen and Electors of the City of Coventry, 27 November 1854; 'Diogenes', Paxton and his Dark Sayings, with the Interpretation Thereof, 28 November 1854.

(2) Coventry Standard, 24 November, 1 December, 8 December 1854. Coventry Herald, 8 December 1854, 9 March 1855. After the election David Buckney was presented by his admirers with a gold watch to mark his retirement from active affairs in Coventry. Coventry Standard, 22 December 1854.

J.S. Whittem and W.H. Gardner) condemned Palmerston and supported Cobden's vote of censure unequivocally; he also argued for further franchise reforms, the ballot, full liberty of conscience, and a pruning of government expenditure. Mellor agreed with Paxton over everything except Palmerstonian diplomacy, which he completely supported: Mellor was brought forward by some members of the reform association who were annoyed with Paxton's voting for Cobden's resolution. Phillimore, the man supported by the Conservative establishment of the city - R.K. Rotherham, Charles Woodcock, William Wilmot, George Eld - attacked the bombardment of Canton fiercely. Apart from that, he thought it necessary to say, a decade after the event, that he had been in favour of Corn Law repeal; he also favoured economical government expenditure, the protection of the ancient rights of freemen (and in particular their franchise) and reforms, such as legal reforms, which avoided 'all violent and organic changes in the framework of our constitution ... I am, therefore, Conservative and Liberal'.(1) Treherne issued an address of studied vagueness. 'You have been acquainted with me and my political principles for about a quarter of a century - they are in unison with those of the British Constitution.'(2) He had not in fact been near the city for twenty-two years but was generally regarded as a 'fine old English gentleman, all of the olden times ... a real good old Tory of the old school'(3); he was against any extension of the franchise.(4)

The one man whose return was certain was Ellice: many Conservatives had promised him one of their two votes.(5) Aged 76, suffering from arthritis and bronchitis, he campaigned with his daughter-in-law Katherine Jane Ellice(provided with a new dark-blue bonnet for the occasion). They arrived at Coventry Station on 21 March: to be met by a crowd of 15,000 calling 'Here he is! there he is! here he comes!' There were 'hurras! Such a squeezing and pushing'.(6) The crowd accompanied them to T.B. Troughton's house, 'without one sign of beer, music, or any other of the

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(1) Coventry Standard, 20 March 1857.

(2) Coventry Herald, 27 March 1857.

(3) Coventry Herald, 27 March, 2 April 1857.

(4) Coventry Standard, 13 March, 20 March, 27 March 1857. Coventry Herald, 13 March, 20 March, 27 March 1857.

(5) Coventry Standard, 3 April 1857. Coventry Herald, 20 March 1857.

(6) National Library of Scotland: Ellice Papers, E72/109 et seq, Katherine Jane Ellice's diary of the 1857 election.

arrangements, and excitements of other times'.(1) Ellice immediately discussed with Troughton and Dresser the line he should take in his speeches. They 'had no doubt we could carry Paxton, if I would say a word in his favour, tho' if I kept it doubtful, and the other liberal, Mellor, remained, the Tory would win'. So on Troughton's obtaining from Paxton a promise to moderate his radical words - 'that he would sin no more' - Ellice agreed to back him.(2) Thus in his first and leading speech he set the tone of his campaign: seeking to unite the liberal cause once more by deprecating the introduction of Palmerston's name as a divisive force (3), and by pointing out

> that we could only maintain power by holding together the most speculative radical, with the most prudent and cautious reformer ... If, on the other hand, we quarrelled, or each man insisted upon his abstract hobby, the whole machine would tumble to pieces, like the French chamber and constitution from the same cause before the fall of L. Philippe.(4)

There were kind words for the honesty and consistency of the Tories, and for their eventual support of liberal reforms - mingled with regret that they took so long to do so. Phillimore alone came in for outright attack, as a Peelite - a member of an unpractical, unprincipled, intriguing 'sect' that 'had only inherited the name of their great leader, having entirely cast to the winds his common sense and sagacity ... It argued very well here - Blues and Rads entirely satisfied - and the old Tories not displeased.'(5)

Jane Ellice watched him speak from a balcony opposite the Craven Arms, and saw a crowd, so tightly packed that if one person moved the whole swayed, listen with great attention - except for a little 'Jeffreys and Barlowing', which '<u>jumping</u> commotion in such a crowd'

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(1) Ellice Papers, E63/43 et seq, Edward Ellice sen. to Edward Ellice jun., 22 March 1857.

(2) loc. cit. The <u>Herald</u>'s advice (20 March 1857) to men tempted to vote for Mellor was that, 'Like a billiard player, by striking Mellor, they put Phillimore into the pocket'.

(3) NB Ellice Papers, E63/43 et seq: 'I tell the People, I did not adulate the character of Palmerston, except in the sense that he was for the time the champion ... of the Liberal party ... he stands by us in these times of trouble, and that we all owe him gratitude and adhesion, for the skill, constancy and courage, with which he has managed our affairs'.

(4) loc. cit.

(5) loc. cit. Ellice also taunted Phillimore with being a Puseyite - 'Phillimore is for convocation'. See also <u>Coventry Standard</u>, 27 March 1857, reporting briefly that Ellice argued that he and Paxton had differed, but not over <u>principles</u>, only over their application.

alarmed her. But it was a mild election, she was told. Afterwards she accompanied Ellice to dye-houses, where he was 'rapturously received', Ford's Hospital, where he was 'hugged to death by a lot of very old women', and the cemetery where 'a gardener who was working there came up. "I've got 2 votes. 2 votes for you. God bless you, and I wish I had 200."'(1) They met an old lady who fondly remembered Ellice's sustaining himself on apricot pies during the 1820 election. At Holy Trinity she heard Drake (for whom Ellice had just obtained the living) preach. At St. Michael's she saw the stained glass which Ellice had presented, and at St. Mary's Hall the painting by Lucca Giordano which (through the agency of Joseph Parkes)(2) Ellice had bought for and given to the city. During polling day they 'walked to all the polling booths, sat and listened to see how people were going to vote. It was almost always "Ellice and Paxton", sometimes a plumper for Ellice, but either way Father E would stretch out his hand to him and "Thank you, my man".'(3)

What Ellice called the 'Whig League to condemn Paxton' failed; by 2 p.m. on polling day Mellor was so far behind Ellice and Paxton that he retired from the poll, complaining, while 'the Tories, and their candidate Phillimore, cut a contemptible figure. It is said that the Carlton gave him £500 to try his chance. They laid out their money badly.' Phillimore also withdrew.(4) Even Treherne did better than he, with 599 votes, as against 356 for Phillimore. Mellor got 703, Paxton 2384, and Ellice 2830. The strength of the liberal ward organisation (to which rueful tribute was paid by the Standard) and of Ellice's appeal to the electorate, was shown by the fact that the great mass of electors - 2125 - voted for Ellice and Paxton.(5)

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(1) Ellice Papers, E72/109 et seq.

(2) See Ellice Papers, E38/153, Joseph Parkes to Edward Ellice, 4 August 1855.

(3) Ellice Papers, E72/109 et seq.

(4) Ellice Papers, E63/45 et seq, Edward Ellice sen. to Edward Ellice jun., 28 March 1857. Coventry Standard, 3 April 1857.

(5) Coventry Herald, 9 April 1857. Coventry Standard, 3 April 1857. A Correct Copy of the Poll (Coventry, 1857), pp. 1 et seq. 322 voted for Ellice and Mellor - the second largest 'joint-voting' category. Ellice's sway over Tory electors is shown by the fact that while 129 voted for him and Phillimore, and 54 for Ellice and Treherne, only 124 voted for Treherne and Phillimore. Ellice and Paxton had separate executive committees but they worked together closely. In addition, the old blues (Ellicites) had a dense organisation of ward committees to undertake the routine work of getting out the vote and these worked hard for Paxton too. Coventry Standard, 3 April, 8 May 1857.

As the state of the poll showed Ellice to be well in the lead, he, Jane Ellice, and Troughton in one carriage and Paxton in a second went in procession through the streets.

> The streets were crammed with people, every window and balcony filled with people waving blue veils, blue ribbons, blue handkerchiefs, little children with blue flags with 'E.E.'. Here and there were pink ribbons for Paxton. We had weavers and dyers on the carriage who having I suppose heard Father E call me Janie pointed out everything to my notice. 'Look Jinny that's the new blue flag, and that's the old one, that we've fit many a good fight for.' 'Ah Jinny you're true blue every inch of you.' 'Send us your husband - we'll take young Ned when the old 'un goes.' All these remarks were not so pleasant to hear but they meant it kindly! The whole way along people - men, women and children - were pressing to shake Father E's poor tired hand which even bled from rough kindness - the women especially 'Edward-ed' near my face. 'I love the sight of him! I do - another one shake old friend - it may be the last one.' 'Let me just touch his flesh once more' or 'Bless you sir. May you wear a crown in heaven, you deserve it' - or 'Send us your son. We'll take the whole generation.' And they grabbed hold of my hand too in the exuberance of their delight. At the 'Black Horse' they brought us out a glass of beer to drink and 'the chimnies' (sweeps) joined us - also drums and pipes playing 'Jeffreys and Barlow'. The people on our carriage singing 'Auld Lang Syne' and calling 'Correct state of the poll - only 4,000 majority - Ellice for ever'!! All this without any beer or treating of any sort - poor people ... Certainly the Queen might have been jealous of Father E's reception today. It was very gratifying.(1)

The 1859 election was another triumph for Ellice. Morgan Treherne stood again, declaring himself to be an independent Conservative. He disliked Derby's current (and abortive) reform bill but was in favour of a moderate extension of the franchise that stopped far short of household suffrage; he promised to oppose any measure that disfranchised freemen by servitude. Paxton, the candidate of the Reform Association, was for household suffrage, the ballot, and triennial parliaments. Ellice favoured a 'liberal, and comprehensive, and at the same time, safe and prudent reform'.(2) He explained his position to a meeting in the Craven Arms. He favoured household suffrage as an eventual goal, but it should be gained by easy and moderate stages

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(1) Ellice Papers, E72/113 et seq. Katherine Jane Ellice's diary. Her denial that treating took place is, however, counterbalanced by Treherne's bitter allegation that the liberal organisation did continue it. Coventry Herald, 3 April 1857.

(2) Ellice Papers, E12/54 et seq: To the Freemen and Electors of the City of Coventry (MS address), 5 April 1859.

> [I] told the people they had little to expect of Reform from this H of C - but the little was better than none for them - that any step taken in this right direction was so much gained - and the further ones were also proceeded with, with greater safety, when the last ones, had succeeded. I denounced the ballot boldly in answer to a question, and as I thought, to general satisfaction.(1)

Thus once more there were strong differences of approach between Ellice and Paxton. But Edward Ellice junior, campaigning for his father,(2) asked plainly for his father's supporters' second votes to go to Paxton. Paxton's, of course, also went to Ellice. As the disappointed Morgan Treherne afterwards complained: 'The Whig is a political Jesuit ... an infamous coalition was formed ... Ellice and Paxton'.(3) Ellice came top of the poll with 3107 votes, Paxton second with 2409, Treherne last with 1928. 2219 voted for both liberals. A sign of Ellice's popularity in the constituency was his receiving the second votes of 739 supporters of Treherne; the Standard believed that 700 of them were really Tories at heart.(4) This was the last election Ellice fought. Much had changed since he had first contested the seat in 1820. The violence offered in 1859 was a pale shadow of that of forty years before. There was a mere fifteen minutes of 'Jeffreys and Barlowing'.(5) A crowd denounced by the Herald as the 'vilest scum of the district' threw cabbages, dead rats and rotten eggs during the nomination and broke several windows. The police were said to take the incident in good humour.(6) But unchanged was the ancient convention that liberal candidates were nominated jointly

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(1) Ellice Papers, E42/111 et seq, Edward Ellice sen. to Joseph Parkes, 1 May 1859.

(2) Edward Ellice senior was by this time suffering very badly from gout and could not stand for long. He did not appear in Coventry till the campaign was almost over.

(3) Coventry Standard, 6 May 1859.

(4) loc. cit. Taunton's List of Polled and Unpolled Voters (Coventry, 1859). Treherne received 1172 plumpers, Ellice 149 and Paxton 173. 17 voted for Paxton and Treherne.

(5) Coventry Herald, 21 April 1859.

(6) Coventry Herald, 6 May 1859. The Herald added that some of the cabbage-throwers were 'blackguards from the surrounding districts' - striking colliers from pits at Wyken and Foleshill, protesting against radicals. Wyken colliery was owned jointly by J.S. Whittem and Paxton. They quarrelled over the dispute - Paxton wishing to settle the dispute by arbitration and Whittem not. There were riots in the colliery at the end of April; to keep order the 4th Light Dragoons were sent from Coventry and 100 men of the 22nd Foot from Manchester; 100 county constables with cutlasses were also brought in.

by middle-class and working-class electors, to show the unifying force of liberal sentiment. In 1859, Ellice was nominated by Abijah Hill Pears, the ribbon master, and one Trickett, a weaver, and Paxton by John Gulson (silk-man) and Thomas Read, again a weaver.(1)

As they performed their ritual the weavers of the city were in the last stages of their long campaign to impose the piece-work system, and its accompanying list of prices, on the factory masters. A few months later, in July 1859, the weavers won this campaign - with the assistance of some ribbon-masters with as great an interest as they in crippling the most efficient factory masters by the piece-work list. The weavers could have then been forgiven for regarding their long alliance with their masters in the liberal cause in politics as the reflection of a genuine identity of interest. But in one year more, catastrophic events were to expose and make active the latent conflict between masters and men in the ribbon trade - conflict for so long masked and postponed by fortunate economic circumstances, backward technology, and outmoded conventions of deference and paternalism.

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(1) Two militant weavers, one factory and one outdoor, bore this name. It is not clear which one nominated Paxton. For the election, see, in addition to the sources named, Coventry Standard, 21 April, 29 April 1859. Coventry Herald, 29 April 1859.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE FREEMEN'S RIGHT

I

The Enclosure of the Lammas Lands

During the early nineteenth century the privilege which the freemen most jealously guarded was the right to pasture cattle on the 1,000 acres of Lammas and Michaelmas lands. They were under attack. Builders, and landowners wishing to disencumber agricultural land, nibbled at the edges. The prevention of these encroachments was the purpose of the annual ceremony of the Lammas riding; each Lammas day the chamberlains rode the boundaries of the lands, accompanied by parties of interested freemen and sometimes by a band. Encroachments were removed - such as the rope walk and saw pit discovered in a field at the top of Bishop Street in 1833. Afterwards, the chamberlains would give a dinner for leading freemen, and when in 1832 they decided to give money to charity instead, some freemen organised a dinner themselves to mark the importance of Lammas Day.(1) A more serious threat than piecemeal encroachment was posed by the repeated suggestion that the Lammas right should be extinguished or, as it was usually put in the city, that the lands should be 'enclosed' (though in fact almost all the lands were already in severalty and there were hardly any open fields near the city).(2) The proposal that the lands

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(1) Coventry Observer, 29 August 1829. Coventry Herald, 17 September 1830, 19 August 1831, 17 August 1832, 16 August 1833. The Lammas riding continued throughout the period.

(2) See, on this point, Victoria County History of Warwickshire, viii, p. 199.

should be enclosed was natural, since they prevented the growth of the city on the west, and in places elsewhere.(1) The first serious suggestion for enclosure seems to have been made in 1810 by James Cramp, attorney, by advertisements in the newspapers. The freemen met to express their irritation, passed resolutions declaring their intention to preserve them in their entirety, and elected a committee of forty-one to guard their interests. This met annually for several years - protesting against encroachments and proposals to enclose - and in 1813 produced its own plan for enclosure, which would have given the freemen one third of the lands in return for the extinction of the grazing right. This was turned down, partly because of the opposition of the weavers' committee.(2) Thereafter the committee was inactive.

In the late 1820s the purchase of small pieces of Lammas land by the Holyhead Road commissioners for Telford's new road through the city(3) entailed the extinction of the pasture right. The act of parliament authorising the purchase of the land empowered the commissioners to pay compensation for the extinction to a committee of named freemen, who had already been elected by a freemen's meeting. It consisted of freemen of many degrees of wealth, with the powerful and affluent predominating: weavers William Fletcher and Isaac Johnson, the ribbon manufacturers William Bray, J. Twaites, John Robinson and Charles Lilly ('King of Spon'), the curriers John Whittem and George Osmond, the banker Robert Bunney, the plumber Adie Cramp, the slaymaker Robert Brown, the watch manufacturer

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(1) See ibid., p. 200, for a map of the lands, redrawn from the enclosure award of 1860. The map makes clear that the municipal commissioners' complaint that the Lammas lands totally prevented expansion everywhere was a vast exaggeration: The Report of the Municipal Commissioners on ... Coventry, p. 94. Prest, op. cit., pp. 21 et seq, is guilty of the same error. The map cited above shows that expansion in the south was also prevented by Cheylesmore Park (now the Memorial Park) owned by the Marquis of Hertford, but that growth north and east was relatively unimpeded. The city grew much in these directions between 1830 and 1860 - e.g. the building of Hillfields and the areas traversed by the Foleshill and Stoney Stanton Roads.

(2) Bodleian Library: MSS Top. Warwickshire C.4 (MS of William Reader), ff. 161 et seq; Gough Add. Warwickshire b. 2 (William Reader's collection of broadsides), Lammas Grounds. At a very numerous meeting, 20 August 1810; To the Freemen of Coventry, 4 September 1810; Lammas Grounds: Report of the Committee, 11 March 1811; To the Freemen of Coventry, 10 September 1812; To the Freemen of Coventry, 26 March 1813; To the Freemen of Coventry, 8 April 1813; To the Freemen of Coventry, 17 April 1813.

(3) That is, the London Road to Much Park Street and the Holyhead road from Spon Street to Allesley.

R.K. Rotherham and one man of unknown profession, Charles Oswin.(1) £468 was paid to this committee, which banked it.(2) A few years later a much greater amount of Lammas land was wanted by the London and Birmingham Railway Company. The act of parliament establishing the company(3) made no special provision for negotiation over the Lammas right, presumably owing to an oversight; but the committee of freemen remained in being informally to negotiate with the company - with some slight changes in personnel owing to deaths. The vacancies were apparently filled by co-optation according to the Holyhead Road Act, the new men being George Eld and J.S. Whittem junior. The committee negotiated with the railway, and got £1393 for the Lammas land it used.(4) It also obtained, through the efforts of John Carter, the addition to the second London and Birmingham railway bill of a clause empowering a general meeting of freemen to decide how to spend the Lammas land compensation money.(5)

A general meeting decided in 1836 to appoint four trustees for the £1861 in the bank - Eld, Cramp, Osmond and William Mayo - and to keep in being the freemen's committee elected years before to negotiate with the Holyhead Road Commissioners.(6) The committee was however largely inactive, and the money stayed in the bank for seven years. In 1843 Eld and J.S. Whittem suggested that it should be used to provide pensions for aged freemen: as a result the Freemen's Seniority Fund was set up by a general meeting of freemen, with Eld, Whittem, R.K. Rotherham, and Abijah Hill Pears (two Tories and two liberals) as its first trustees. The principal, amounting now with accrued interest to over £2000, was invested; from the interest a few aged freemen were to receive a pension of

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(1) Public and General Acts, 9 Geo. IV, cap. 75, An Act for the further improvement of the road from London to Holyhead, clause 10. West, op. cit., p. 767.

(2) Coventry Herald, 5 August 1836.

(3) Local and Personal Acts, 3 and 4 William IV, cap. 36.

(4) Coventry Herald, 3 October, 10 October 1834, 5 August 1836. Whittem was the currier of that name prominent in liberal politics for many years after 1830. He and Eld replaced Charles Lilly and William Bray.

(5) Coventry Herald, 24 April, 22 May, 18 September 1835. Local and Personal Acts, 5 and 6 William IV, cap. 56: An Act to enable the London and Birmingham Railway to extend and alter the lines of such Railway, and for other purposes relating thereto, clause 14. Eld and Osmond were Tories, Cramp a liberal, and Mayo a leading Radical.

(6) Coventry Herald, 5 August 1836.

6s. a week. They were to be chosen by a committee of the trustees and many others deliberately appointed by the meeting to reflect all shades of political opinion and so to exclude all partiality from the choice of pensioners; thus Buckney and Taunton became members of the fund committee. Provision was made for regular re-election of the committee.(1)

Meanwhile, fresh proposals for enclosure of the Lammas lands were made in leading articles in the newspapers from 1829 onwards - when, significantly, the growth of the city as a result of the boom in the mid-1820s focussed attention on the shortage of building land. It was argued that they would provide it - and, said the Observer, particularly for the middle-classes. The owners of the Lammas lands had no incentive to improve them, while the grazing right was enjoyed by only those few freemen who owned cattle. Enclosure was commended as being of greater benefit to both the city and the freemen at large.(2) A general meeting of freemen unanimously declared in 1836 that they would be willing to negotiate enclosure. Some freemen shrewdly pointed out that compensation in freehold land would allow them to profit from future rises in the value of the land.(3) Others argued for compensation by chief rent - and at least one freeman wanted outright sale of their rights to the city so as to create a fund to build an asylum for aged freemen.(4)

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(1) Coventry Standard, 21 April 1843. Buckney was chairman of the Seniority Fund Committee in 1846. Further sums were added to the Seniority Fund in 1844 and 1847 because of the extinction of the Lammas right entailed in the building of Coventry cemetery and the Coventry and Nuneaton railway. Coventry Standard, 6 February 1846, 24 September, 1 October 1847, 10 October 1851. The Seniority Fund still exists (1970) and 10s. a week is paid to some 30 aged freemen. A meeting of freemen in 1839 had proposed on William Taunton's suggestion that the compensation money should be used as a defence fund to protect the rights of freemen in the battle to enclose the Lammas lands. No more had been heard of this plan. Coventry Standard, 15 November 1839.

(2) Coventry Observer, 29 August, 10 December 1829. Coventry Herald, 29 August 1834, 22 May 1835, 5 August 1836, Coventry Standard, 3 August 1838. After closely investigating the question, Thomas Bromfield put the number of freemen who owned cattle at only 200 - out of 3,200 freemen altogether; 80 non-freemen cattle-owners, he claimed, made use of the grazing right under cover of the 'fathering' provided by dishonest freemen. Coventry Standard, 8 June 1838. In the same year the chamberlains calculated that 229 freemen grazed 349 cattle on the Lammas lands. Coventry Herald, 7 December 1838.

(3) Coventry Herald, 5 August 1836, and the letters of 'Justus', 'an old freeman' and Thomas Bromfield in ibid, 5 October, 26 October 1832, 20 April 1838, and Coventry Standard, 13 April 1838.

(4) Coventry Herald, 21 September, 12 October 1832, 12 August 1836: letters of 'a resident freeman', 'observer', and William Browett.

The debate intensified in 1838. In June Bromfield and Browett denounced the lands bitterly in the town council, as obstacles to the city's expansion; their future was referred to the watch committee for consideration.(1) Shortly afterwards the Freemen's Committee(2) - with Eld, R.K. Rotherham and the two Whittems as leading members - called a meeting of freemen in the County Hall to discuss enclosure. A majority were in favour, provided that the freemen were given freehold land in compensation. David Buckney spoke vehemently in favour, holding out a vision of the golden future awaiting the freemen: they could acquire the county franchise, and become steadily richer because their freehold land could be let out in short building leases at ground rents that could constantly be raised when the leases fell in. Eight freemen were added to the freemen's committee of thirteen to negotiate enclosure.(3) Opposition to the plan of enclosure came from freemen anxious to retain the Lammas lands and the grazing right; they had not previously been heard but were angry now. When the decision went against them they formed the Freemen's Protection Association, of which Thomas Paine, the reactionary Tory weaver of Well Street, was a leading member. He argued that there was plenty of land for building and that the Lammas lands were the only ancient privilege the freemen had left, since £10 electors had been created to swamp the freemen and since 'all charities had been thrown open to foreigners and aliens' - to men, that is, who had never lived in Coventry. The Freemen's Protection Association seems to have consisted of humble 'cowkeepers', and to have included no Coventry

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(1) Coventry Standard, 8 June 1838.

(2) That is, the Freemen's Committee (with thirteen members) appointed to receive the Lammas land compensation money from the Holyhead Road commissioners - though there had been some changes in personnel in the committee since that time; vacancies were filled by co-optation.

(3) The committee of twenty-one included many members of the city establishment: the dyehouse proprietor George Eld, the watch manufacturers R.K. Rotherham and Thomas Bromfield, the curriers J. and J.S. Whittem, the ribbon manufacturers Joseph Coleman, James Twaites, John Sawbridge and John Robinson, the slaymaker Thomas Brown, and the tailors Richard Hands and William Weston. There was also at least one weaver - Isaac Johnson. The callings of the other members cannot be traced and were presumably humble. Coventry Standard, 3 August 1838. West, op. cit., pp. 767 et seq.

notables.(1)

The proprietors of the Lammas lands had formed a committee in 1836 to negotiate the terms of enclosure with the freemen.(2) This met the freemen's committee of twenty-one in St. Mary's Hall in August, and agreed on compensation 'in kind' and to promote with the freemen a parliamentary bill for the extinction of the pasture right.(3) But rumours that the terms of enclosure agreed at the meeting were not fully favourable to the freemen began to circulate in the city: the result was a series of meetings of freemen in public houses which resolved that the committee of twenty-one had exceeded the mandate given to them at their election in July; the meetings of freemen now called on the committee not to proceed any further with the enclosure plan till it had been submitted to all freemen and gained their support. Thomas Paine and David Buckney were active in this populist movement, and William Wilmot was engaged as its solicitor.(4) William Browett spoke for it in the town council, voicing fears over Eld and company - 'whether, like the miller, they would grind the flour, and only give the freemen the bran'.(5)

In March the introduction of the bill was imminent. William Taunton and David Buckney were the leading members of a committee of nine elected by a meeting in the Swan public house to watch over the interests of freemen during its passage and to fight for not less than one third of the Lammas land, at freehold tenure, in compensation for enclosure. Thomas Paine arrived at the meeting drunk, shouted angrily his opposition to enclosure on any terms, and refused to serve on the committee. Pressure from the committee of nine led to a meeting at County Hall at which John Carter (acting for the committee of twenty-one) explained the terms of the

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(1) Coventry Standard, 3 August 1838. Paine's complaint about the charities was of course untrue. See also Coventry Herald, 21 September 1838, for Buckney's letter defending the freemen's right to compensation in freehold land and protesting against the argument that the Lammas lands were the sole obstacle to the expansion of the city: this was also due to the Marquis of Hertford's Cheylesmore Park - entailed under an 'absurd and abominable rule'.

(2) Coventry Herald, 26 August 1836.

(3) Coventry Herald, 24 August, 9 November 1838. Coventry Standard, 24 August 1838.

(4) Coventry Herald, 23 November, 7 December, 14 December 1838. Coventry Standard, 23 November 1838.

(5) Coventry Herald, 30 November 1838.

bill: it would provide for an annual rent-charge divisible among the freemen. Wilmot pointed out the unsatisfactory nature of this settlement: the rent-charge would be fixed and would not permit the freemen to take advantage of appreciation in the value of land. He insisted on one third of the land, at freehold. Carter offered to permit the views of the freemen to be taken after the first reading. Buckney's counter-motion was carried: that the bill should be immediately examined by the freemen and the meeting adjourned for one month so that their opinion might be taken. It was taken. It was entirely hostile to enclosure at less compensation than one third of the land. The committee of twenty-one and the committee of landowners agreed that the bill had to be dropped. The episode was a victory for the populist freemen's movement, against the establishment led by Eld.(1) Some months later a meeting of freemen in County Hall resolved, on Taunton's recommendation, that the £1861 received from the sale of Lammas land for the Holyhead Road and the railway should be used as a defence fund to protect the rights of the freemen in any future battle for enclosure.(2)

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(1) Coventry Standard, 8 March, 15 March, 19 April 1839. Apart from Buckney and Taunton, the committee of nine consisted of men otherwise quite unknown. The extent to which radical freemen could defend the peculiar privileges of their order was also shown in October 1842, when James Orange lectured in the city to propose the setting up of a Coventry branch of his Labourers' and Artisans' Friend Society, which had as its chief aim the provision of allotments for working men. Starkey and Peter Hoy, two prominent Chartists, bitterly attacked the plan as likely to menace the Lammas and Michaelmas lands. They joined with the reactionary Tory Thomas Paine in an attempt to prevent the society being set up. They were defeated, largely because of the efforts of Charles Bray, as much in favour of allotments as he was the enemy of the Lammas lands. Coventry Herald, and Coventry Standard, 7 October 1842.

(2) Coventry Standard, 15 November 1839. The money, however, was not so used. There was one other successful protection of their rights by freemen at this time. Joseph Liggins, a miller at Whitley, put up a wall round a small piece of Lammas land near Whitley Common. The fence was noticed at the Lammas riding in 1838, and protest made, but it remained a year later. About 200 freemen demolished it. Six were charged at Coventry magistrates' court with demolishing the wall and creating a riot. John Carter appeared for Liggins, William Wilmot for the freemen. The magistrates dismissed the case. Coventry Herald, 17 August 1838. Coventry Standard, 16 August, 6 September 1839. Liggins immediately laid an information at Warwick against the demolishers for riotous assembly and described them as 'Chartists'; this annoyed Wilmot intensely. The town clerk of Coventry brought a concurrent action against Liggins for encroachment. At Warwick Assizes the prosecution admitted the injustice of describing the demolishing freemen as Chartists; they were bound over to keep the peace. The city's action against Liggins was dropped. Wilmot's costs as defence solicitor were met by collections in Coventry public houses. Coventry Standard, 14 August, 21 August 1840. Three years

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This came a few years later. Charles Bray saw the Lammas lands as a useless anachronism constricting the city's growth and 'preventing the growth of a suburban population and the higher public opinion dependent upon it'.(1) They could provide not only building land but also allotments for artisans - his favourite remedy for urban poverty - and pleasure grounds for the city as a whole, where families could 'enjoy themselves under the shade of the evergreens'.(2) In the autumn of 1843 Bray worked out a plan for the enclosure of the lands. The freemen were to receive, in compensation for their pasture right, a proportion not of the lands but of their current market value - the value of one third of the Lammas land and one quarter of the Michaelmas land. Part of this money would go directly into the Freemen's Seniority Fund and part would be used to buy about 100 acres of land to provide quarter-acre allotments for freemen and other land for country houses and gardens for richer freemen. These would be let at economic rents of £1 for the allotments and £10 for the houses a year, and the rentals would be paid into the seniority fund. Thus augmented, the seniority fund would yield more pensions and the endowment for a new school where freemen's sons might receive a practical education. The plan was commended by the committee of the Freemen's Seniority Fund, by William Taunton and J.S. Whittem, and by David Buckney, who found it as hard to be consistent over the enclosure of the Lammas lands as he did over Corn Law repeal. Copious details of the plan (intended to form the basis of a parliamentary bill) were printed and taken round all ten wards by paid agents, who succeeded in gaining the signatures in support of a majority of the freemen. In January the town council at Bray's request took over the promotion of the bill to enclose on Bray's plan.(3)

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(2) cont.
later Liggins had rebuilt his wall and freemen again demolished it. Charles Woodcock - another Tory - appeared for the freemen and succeeded in getting the case dismissed. In 1844 the freemen found at the Lammas riding that the wall had been rebuilt yet again and demolished it. At Coventry Quarter Sessions the chairman summed up in favour of the freemen, and the jury acquitted them, to loud cheers from freemen present in the court. Coventry Standard, 18 August 1843, 16 August, 23 August, 18 October 1844. Liggins rebuilt the wall but when it was once again demolished, on Lammas Day 1845, those responsible were not prosecuted. ibid., 15 August 1845.

(1) Charles Bray, Phases of Opinion and Experience, p. 83.

(2) Coventry Standard, 17 November 1843, Charles Bray's letter.

(3) Coventry Standard, 1 December, 8 December, 15 December, 22 December, 29 December 1843, 5 January, 12 January, 19 January 1844.

But opposition developed, encouraged by Wilmot and Paine - who was still against enclosure altogether, but believed that 'if change must be made, let us have bona fide land for land'.(1) At the end of 1843 and the beginning of 1844 meetings of freemen in public houses throughout the city were told of the full implications of the scheme to which many had blithely signed their names. The meetings now turned it down. David Buckney was the most prominent freemen to change his mind - provoking the anger of Charles Bray as a result. A majority of freemen were eager to have enclosure in return for compensation in land(2) - one third of the Lammas and one quarter of the Michaelmas being the proportion expected: with this amount of land on building leases - whose value would appreciate as the city grew - Wilmot believed that one third of the freemen (or 100 times more than received pensions from the seniority fund at that time) would eventually be supported in old age. One argument advanced against compensation in land was that to give the freemen portions of the land of each proprietor would mean that their plots would be small and scattered; Wilmot and freemen correspondents in the press pointed out that in fact the freemen could be given sizeable plots at the junction of each proprietor's fields. In contrast, the bill proposed by Bray and the town council merely gave the freemen the right to spend part of their compensation money scrambling in the market to buy land - land which the freemen's liberty to let out on building leases was in any case doubtful under the terms of the bill. A crowning insult was that Bray proposed at first that the freemen should receive money compensation based on the commonable value of the Lammas and Michaelmas land, which was, as freemen shrewdly pointed out, much less than the value it would have as land in severalty the day after. Bray and the town council conceded this last point but no other: the bill as published in February provided for compensation at the severalty value but retained the other features.(3)

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(1) Coventry Standard, 18 August, 8 December, 29 December 1843, letters of Thomas Paine.

(2) 300 freemen, including Thomas Paine, remained opposed to enclosure on any terms. Coventry Standard, 15 March 1844.

(3) Coventry Standard, 24 November, 1 December, 15 December, 29 December 1843, 12 January, 19 January, 26 January, 2 February, 9 February, 16 February, 1 March, 8 March, 15 March, 12 April, 10 May 1844. One of Paine's bitter complaints against Bray was that he was not even a freeman. A more common argument among Tory freemen was that the enclosure plan was a liberal plot: 'the same jealousy that would have deprived you of your franchise is now working to prevent your acquiring further influence by the possession of what

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The freemen fought the bill all the way. Meetings elected thirteen delegates to head the opposition; they were all humble men, not otherwise prominent in the city's affairs.(1) In the town council Buckney argued vainly that agreement between freemen and landowners should precede submission of the bill; this would have meant in effect the landowners' conceding compensation in land. Wilmot and John Warden (the Chartist plumber) voted against the motion in February to petition Parliament for leave to introduce the bill. When the bill was published, Wilmot and Buckney presented a memorial against it whose 1700 signatures had been collected by the thirteen delegates - a memorial which formed the ground of a petition to the House of Commons against the bill in April, after its first reading. Wilmot, Buckney and two other councillors were the minority voting for the dropping of the bill in May.(2) In the same week, however, Ellice and Williams, pressed hard by Wilmot and the freemen, wrote to say that they believed that the freemen ought to be given compensation in land, as the freemen of Nottingham had been in a recent parallel case; they pressed Sir James Graham and brought him to agree to this principle being included in the bill. The mayor, J.S. Whittem, saw the Speaker, who told him that the bill would founder unless land were given. The town council agreed that compensation in land should be written into the bill in committee. The problem was now the sixty landowners involved. They had been uneasy about the amount of compensation money offered by the bill and had agreed to it in the first place only on condition that it passed without modification - a reservation called 'a novel constitutional doctrine' by the Standard.(3) They were now most reluctant to offer land, certainly in the proportions expected.(4)

(3) cont.
fairly belongs to you'. ibid., 8 March 1844, letter of a 'freeman critique'. A meeting in March to consider the grievances of Ireland - the audience consisted of the dissenting and Roman Catholic clergy and the leading liberals, who were addressed by O'Connell - was interrupted by members of the White Horse Operative Conservative Association, led by William Bourne. The police had to restore order. When reproved by the editor of the Herald Bourne replied, 'As to my being a Tory agent, I am quite at liberty to please myself as he has to be the gutter for the vomitings of the popularity-hunting partisans of Dan, the one-sided political economising Anti-Corn Law League, or the Lammas land plunderers of Coventry'. Coventry Standard, 22 March, 29 March 1844.

(1) They are named in Coventry Standard, 15 March 1844. Only five can be traced in Lascelles's comprehensive Directory: they were first-hand journeymen weavers with three or more looms in their homes. Another was William Bourne, the Operative Conservative rabble-rouser.

(2) Coventry Standard, 12 January, 23 February, 15 March, 10 May 1844. Journals of the House of Commons, xcix (1844), pp. 130, 222. Parliamentary Debates, third series, lxxiii (1844), p. 989. Lord Worsley introduced the bill on 14 March.

(3) Coventry Standard, 15 March, 10 May, 17 May, 24 May 1844.

(4) ibid., 24 May 1844.

The freemen stuck out for 'a third and a quarter', and wrote to Ellice asking him to oppose the second reading because the landowners would not agree to these terms and the freemen feared that the town council might in consequence fail to support them. They refused to listen to Ellice's counter-proposal that the bill might still be altered favourably in committee; Ellice and Williams agreed to oppose the second reading. They and Stratford Dugdale (member for North Warwickshire) arranged a meeting of all parties in Dugdale's London house: Whittem and Troughton (the town clerk) for the corporation, Wilmot and two of the thirteen for the freemen, Eld, Charles Woodcock and John Carter for the landowners, and the three M.P.s. The M.P.s pressed hard to get the landowners to agree to compensation in land, at the freemen's proportions. Carter and Woodcock refused. Eld, torn by a conflict between his loyalty to the freemen's ancient privileges and his self-interest, said nothing. There was deadlock. The M.P.s advised that the bill should be dropped: the town council did so in June, and it thus did not reach a second reading.(1) The freemen celebrated by passing resolutions of thanks to those who had helped them to gain the victory.

> We, as a body, are poor men. It is true that some possess affluence and influence. A few of these, to their honour be it spoken, are with us; but the majority of such is with the side that is against us ... We have to contend with influence, power, and wealth combined, for the purpose of oppressing us, invading our rights, and cramping our energies.(2)

At the Lammas riding in August the Coventry Band led a procession of freemen round the boundaries while two men carried banners inscribed 'Freemen, be not like Esau, to sell your birthright for a

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(1) ibid., 31 May, 7 June (quoting correspondence between Ellice and the committee of thirteen), 14 June, 21 June, 28 June 1844. Eld and Woodcock were the only members of the council who owned Lammas or Michaelmas land. ibid., 17 May 1844.

(2) ibid., 28 June 1844. NB the comment of Charles Bray, Phases of Opinion, p. 83. After the initial signatures to his proposal 'we were doomed to have an illustration of the fickleness of public opinion. The few whose interests were opposed to the enclosure, backed by a clever lawyer, persuaded their fellow Freemen that they were about to be robbed, and that I was in the interest of the landowner.' Thomas Paine's comment was that 'I firmly believe the lawyers, delegates, and landowners ran in one harness to gallop away with the envious prize of the Lammas and Commons, could they have come to terms, and not have been opposed by us 700 freemen, who were determined not to have any alteration'. Wilmot was the only prominent citizen for whom Paine had any time: he fully earned, said Paine, his fees of £512 to defend the freemen's case. Coventry Standard, 3 October 1845. Other freemen - and chiefly William Taunton and David Buckney - thought Wilmot charged too much and were denounced by Paine as 'demagogues and radicals'. ibid., 24 October, 31 October 1845.

mess of pottage'.(1)

This was the last attempt for some years to enclose the Lammas lands: despite the fact that the question of public health in the city was much debated in the mid-1840s and that the Lammas lands were often blamed for disease.(2) The freemen vigilantly guarded the lands against enclosure and infringement. Lord Lincoln's bill of 1845, which would have made the enclosure of common lands a simpler matter, aroused the opposition of Thomas Paine and his friends, who petitioned against it.(3) More intense opposition was aroused by the corporation's giving a small piece of common land in the Butts to the Church of England as a site for St. Thomas's church in 1845. The gift was decided on in the town council only after acrimonious debate, and opposition to it on religious grounds from dissenters such as David Buckney and William Browett. The land belonged to the corporation.(4) Thomas Paine claimed that it was common, and thus belonged to the freemen; he hastened to add that he was eager to help the Church of England in its fight against 'idolatrous Romanism, Atheism and Infidelity', but not at the expense of freemen's land. He threatened to tear up the stakes and fill up the trenches as soon as the land was measured out.(5) The

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(1) Coventry Standard, 16 August 1844.

(2) The inadequate and overcrowded housing, burial grounds, drainage, sewerage, street cleaning and water supply of the city were all condemned as responsible for the city's high mortality in P.P.: [610] H.C. (1845), xviii: Appendix, Part II, to Second Report of the Commissioners for Enquiry into the State of Large Towns, pp. 258 et seq. The report blamed the Lammas lands for much of the overcrowding: 'the Lammas grounds have cramped the city, and forced the poorer inhabitants into those lanes, courts, and alleys to languish out their brief and unhappy existence'. p. 262. In an accompanying report the town council recommended the enclosure of the Lammas lands. The need to enclose the Lammas lands, once again held accountable for overcrowding, was emphasised by William Ranger, Report to the General Board of Health ... into the ... Sanitary Conditions of the Inhabitants of the City of Coventry (London, 1849), p. 10: 'at present the city is literally hidebound'. Letters in reply in the Coventry Standard, 29 June, 13 July 1849 pointed out that there was plenty of building land to the east, north-east and south-east of the city and that thus the city was not hidebound by the Lammas lands. They go on to attack Ranger's alleged scare-mongering about the sanitary state of the city and to express opposition to 'expensive' public-health schemes. This was the attitude that Wilmot expressed in the local board of health. He also objected strongly to Ranger's suggestion that when the Lammas lands were enclosed part should become a park open to the general public: this would have infringed the special privileges of the freemen. ibid., 20 July 1849. W. Ranger, op. cit., p. 20.

(3) Coventry Standard, 13 June, 11 July 1845. Journals of the House of Commons, C (1845), p. 700. The bill became law on 8 August: 8 and 9 Vict. cap. 118: An Act to facilitate the Inclosure and Improvement of Lands held in Common ... This was the act under which the Lammas lands were in due course enclosed.

(4) Coventry Standard, 16 May, 4 July 1845.

(5) ibid., 18 July 1845.

Freemen's Protection Association sent memorials to the Treasury and the Rector of St. John's (the parish concerned) protesting against the alleged illegality of the corporation's action; the land had for years been used for the 'recreation and sanitary improvement of the inhabitants'.(1) The Treasury, however, decided that the corporation's act was legal, and refused any further enquiry into the matter even when approached by the committee of the Freemen's Seniority Fund.(2) The land was transferred to the church by the town council, though Buckney, a late convert to the FPA's case, argued that it belonged to the freemen and moved, unsuccessfully, that the corporate seal should not be placed on the conveyance.(3) The Freemen's Protection Association then sent a memorial to the Bishop of Worcester alleging that the land proposed for his new church was freemen's property; the bishop merely acknowledged receipt and the matter was then dropped.(4)

The Freemen's Protection Association was more successful in its battle with the town council a few years later. Before 1836 the dues paid by the owners of unmarked cattle found on the common lands by the chamberlains had been paid into charities after the chamberlains' salaries had been defrayed. After 1836 the surplus was paid into the borough fund. Thomas Paine seems not to have become aware of this fact until 1851. In September of that year the FPA decided to press the town council to pay the surplus into the seniority fund: meetings of freemen were held in the ten ancient wards of the city to collect signatures for a petition to the council.(5) The petitions were presented in October by William Wilmot, who urged that the money should be paid into the seniority fund. J.S. Whittem and George Eld argued that the Municipal

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(1) ibid., 8 August 1845. Note the FPA's shrewd reference to current jargon.

(2) ibid., 20 March, 24 April, 5 June 1846.

(3) ibid., 10 July 1846.

(4) ibid., 19 March 1847. The church was consecrated in 1849. Thomas Paine also complained bitterly that the new Roman Catholic chapel in Hill Street (St. Osburg's) encroached on Lammas land, that the corporation was taking sand from the Windmill Field (another piece of Lammas) for the new waterworks, and that the new reservoir at Radford was built partly on Lammas land. Wilmot joined him in this last complaint. None of these complaints seems to have been justified. Coventry Standard, 7 August, 20 November 1846. See also Paine's letter in ibid., 23 November 1849, expressing the FPA's determination to resist infringements.

(5) Coventry Standard, 29 August, 5 September, 12 September 1851.

Corporations Act gave such monies to the corporation and that any surplus should be spent on improving the commons. The law was obscure. Some councillors argued that counsel's opinion should be taken. A prompt decision was however encouraged by the crowd of freemen in the public seats who called out, as Whittem spoke, 'His death warrant is signed ... He is going out ... He shall not get in again'. Wilmot's motion was agreed by 24 votes to 13.(1)

The essential question remained: how was the ever-increasing pressure on the Lammas lands to be met and what was to be their future? William Wilmot urged the freemen to agree to the extinction of the grazing right in return for compensation in land, which when let out on building leases would keep many aged freemen in comfort.(2) Most freemen agreed with him, as was shown by the discussion at the meeting of 600 freemen in May 1849, called to debate the bill introduced into the Lords by the Earl of Carlisle to permit the easier enclosure of freemen's lands in the English boroughs.(3) Leading freemen such as Benjamin Poole and David Buckney welcomed

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(1) Coventry Standard, 24 October 1851. Next June Paine turned to another grievance. The toll paid by stallholders who took plots on Greyfriars Green during the Great Fair had always been paid to the corporation. Paine argued that the freemen ought to be compensated by part of the tolls for the destruction of their herbage on the green by the press of fair-goers. He hinted that unless some 'compensation' were paid into the seniority fund the freemen might create widespread confusion at the fair, by exercising their legal right to place in the pinfold any horse or carriage found on the green without the chamberlain's mark. As preparations were being made for the fair, Paine led a party of freemen onto the green and chased off the workmen laying gas-pipes and setting up stalls. A special meeting of the town council was hurriedly called and decided to hold the fair not on the green but on small plots of land all over the city. But in the night some stallholders and a circus, ignorant of the change of plan, set up on Greyfriars Green. In the morning another meeting of the council was held. The circus and the stalls could not be removed without a breach of the peace. Wilmot said, 'Who, I would like to know, would undertake to remove the wild beasts?'. The council agreed to hold the fair on the green and to pay £25 (one-third of the toll-money) into the seniority fund to keep Paine's men quiet. Coventry Standard, 11 June 1852. The corporation paid £25 into the seniority fund on the occasion of each great fair thereafter as recompense for the destruction of grass on Greyfriars Green. ibid., 11 August 1854, 23 January 1857. The Coventry Standard pointed out that in fact no grass ever grew on Greyfriars Green: 20 January 1854.

(2) Coventry Standard, 17 August 1849, 15 August 1851.

(3) The bill - the Freemen's Land Bill P.P.: H.L. 101 (1849) - empowered freemen of English boroughs to appoint 'Land Wardens' to administer their lands, and their pasturing and cultivation, and to negotiate the extinction of freemen's commonable rights upon them if requested by two-thirds of the freemen present at a meeting.

the bill, with reservations. William Bourne and Thomas Paine put the FPA's point of view - that all plans for enclosure should be fought and the lands preserved for cattle for ever.(1) Their arguments were rejected, and the committee of the seniority fund (as the most reputable and permanent body representing the freemen) was empowered to support the bill and gain alterations in it where necessary.(2) The bill was in the event withdrawn(3), but the issue remained, and was discussed again in 1852 at a meeting called by the committee of the seniority fund to consider a request put to it by Joseph Webb that he should be allowed to open a quarry on Lammas land near Naul's Mill in return for compensation to be paid into the seniority fund. Once again Paine argued that no permanent infringements should be allowed and that the lands should remain open for pasture for ever. David Buckney and John Steane took the view with which the majority agreed - that there were only 150 bona fide cattle keepers out of 4,000 freemen and that, if compensation was not taken, infringements would continue in any case: the pressure was irresistible. The committee of the seniority fund was empowered to negotiate.(4)

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(1) It should be noted that even if the Lammas lands had been enclosed the 200 acres of common would still have been available for pasture: their enclosure was not at any time proposed. Thus the council committee that wrote to the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Large Towns and Populous Districts in 1843 on the subject wished the Lammas lands to be enclosed and the commons improved for the pasturage of cattle. See P.P.: [610] H.C. (1845) xviii: Appendix to the Second Report of the Commissioners ... p. 265, letter of Joseph Newton.

(2) Coventry Standard, 1 June 1849. See also Paine's letter in ibid., 27 July 1849, bitterly attacking the bill as a proposal to sweep away 'every ancient, hallowed and vested right' and deprive the freemen of the land they needed for good health. It was referred to a select committee of the Lords after its second reading.

(3) Journals of the House of Lords, lxxxi (1849), p. 242. Coventry Standard, 27 July 1849.

(4) Coventry Standard, 13 August 1852. The seniority fund committee thus took charge of negotiations with all who wished to effect infringements of the pasture right legally, sitting weekly for this purpose during the grazing season. By the end of 1852 it had gained £32 for the seniority fund in compensation. ibid., 27 August, 3 September, 15 October, 22 October, 10 December 1852, 7 January 1853. The seniority fund committee gained another £43 compensation for infringements in 1854, and in return there were no demolitions at the Lammas riding that year, as there had been in 1853. ibid., 18 August 1854. Even some of the freemen cattle-owners themselves believed that the enclosure of the Lammas lands, in exchange for portions of them given over to permanent pasture, would be preferable to the existing privilege of wide pasturage for merely that part of the year when the grass was thinnest - especially since spring and summer pasture was so expensive in the city. See ibid., 17 September 1847, letter of a 'Freeman and Cowkeeper'. W.H. Gardner also pointed

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The extent of the pressure on the Lammas lands in these years of growing prosperity and expansion in Coventry, the determination of some freemen to resist encroachments for which compensation had not been paid, and above all the advantages which would accrue to the freemen if they and the proprietors co-operated, were all shown at the Lammas Riding of 1853. A large body of freemen demolished new and uncovenanted walls and fences at Naul's Mill, Bishopgate and Chapelfields - the last being part of a house that transgressed the boundary of Hearsall Common by several inches.(1) Within months meetings of the freemen had decided, against the repeated opposition of Paine's small group of reactionaries, to work for a private act of parliament allowing them to treat with individual proprietors of the lands for the extinction of the grazing right in return for at least one third of the Lammas and one quarter of the Michaelmas. Thus most freemen agreed with John Steane: 'His idea was in favour of what he would not hesitate to call conservative reform (Cheers)'.(2) A committee of thirteen freemen was elected to carry this plan into effect; its secretary and leading spirit was Nathaniel Poole, almost certainly a first-hand ribbon weaver with perhaps two looms.(3)

Collections were made, and Wilmot of course engaged as solicitor. Many obstacles stood in the way. Least important was the Freemen's Protection Association; Paine was met derisively with cries of 'Pig and Whistle' (the public house where the association met) when at a large meeting in January he argued once more for

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(4) cont.
out that the 200 acres of commons were 'more gorse than grass', were swampy and unfenced and that many cattle were lost. ibid., 13 August 1852, letter.

(1) Coventry Standard, 19 August 1853.

(2) Coventry Standard, 14 October, 21 October, 4 November, 23 December 1853. The freemen also declared their willingness to accept, in lieu of the actual land, one-third and one-quarter of the clear annual rents of the lands, the amount to be freshly determined at least every few years to give them the benefit of appreciations in value. No more was heard of this idea. C.W.C.: Pamphlets Collection, 'S.F.C.', An Authentic Record of the Principal Facts, Dates of Meetings, and other Proceedings connected with the Inclosure ... (Coventry, 1859), p. 4.

(3) ibid., 4 November 1853. This committee was afterwards called the Freemen's Committee. Poole lived in Nelson Street (ibid., 16 December 1853) which consists of small houses with engine-loom shops over; but he is not listed in Lascelle's Directory, which records only those first-hands with three or more looms. In 1860 Poole was a member of the Executive Committee of the Ribbon Weavers' Association.

the continuance of the grazing right; only five or six freemen - far fewer than a decade before - now agreed with him. Disposed of with equal ease was the suggestion that the land allotted to the freemen should go to that fashionable amenity, a park for the general public. The same meeting passed unanimously a resolution to the effect that the freemen's land was to be used for the benefit of the freemen alone.(1) Much more serious was the reluctance of the fifty or so proprietors of the Lammas lands to offer land in compensation - and in particular, the desire of the trustees of Sir Thomas White's charity (who were investing much of the vast unspent income of the loan-fund in Lammas land)(2) to give no more than a fixed rent-charge. The January meeting passed unanimously a resolution declaring their willingness to negotiate for land only.(3) When asked for his advice by Nathaniel Poole, Edward Ellice pointed out that the passage of a private bill would be difficult, since the House of Commons was prejudiced against freemen and since there was now no institution that could legally act for all the freemen in parliamentary proceedings as the old corporation once had.(4)

The refusal of the great majority of the owners of Lammas land to support a move for a private bill was another hazard. Thus though when circularised most of the freemen agreed to promote one, and the town council (when asked by Wilmot) gave the plan its unanimous blessing,(5) Wilmot and Poole advised a meeting of freemen

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(1) At the annual general meeting of the friends of the Coventry and Warwickshire Hospital a year later, Wilmot made great play with the generous willingness of the freemen to give up 'three or four acres' of their expected allotment of Lammas land for the desperately needed site for a new hospital, 'though it would benefit the public quite as much as themselves'. Coventry Standard, 26 January 1855.

(2) For this matter, see Section II of this chapter.

(3) Coventry Standard, 6 January, 13 January, 27 January, 17 March 1854. See also William Wilmot's letter, ibid., 3 February 1854, warning against the acceptance of anything but land and arguing that the profits of short building leases on the freemen's land should go to augment the seniority fund.

(4) Coventry Standard, 27 January 1854, letter of Edward Ellice.

(5) Wilmot made clear, however, that he was torn between his desire to augment the freemen's seniority fund and his dislike of the prospect of urban growth (on the enclosed Lammas lands) that would produce the extra cash: 'he did not think it an advantage that towns should increase in size, as regards the comforts of the poor, for the more they congregated together the more competition there was amongst them, and the more misery, poverty and depravity'. Coventry Standard, 11 August 1854.

in November that they should instead apply, with landowners who agreed, for the extinction of the pasture right by government commissioner under the General Enclosure Act. Sufficient landowners, thought Wilmot, would be willing to apply for a commissioner: and though he might award smaller proportions than the third of the Lammas and the quarter of the Michaelmas that the freemen wanted his decision would still have to be accepted by two thirds of the freemen.(1) The meeting defeated the usual motion from the FPA that the grazing right should remain (only twelve voted for it), passed by a large majority one moved by Nathaniel Poole calling for 'a third and a quarter', and agreed to apply for a commissioner.(2)

The owners of at least one third of the land had under the act to request the appointment of a commissioner. More than this proportion was attained by May 1855; the owners of 493 acres (or almost half the Lammas land) had signed. They included the trustees of Sir Thomas White's charity (who owned 250 acres), the Marquis of Hertford, and Coventrians such as George Eld, Charles Bray, William Royle and the Wyley and Rotherham families. They also included the corporation, who owned about thirty acres and who alone among the proprietors agreed to give the freemen the one third allotment they asked for.(3) The assistant enclosure commissioner, J.J. Rawlinson, came to the city in June, circumvented with Wilmot's help an attempt by the solicitor of the FPA to have the proceedings declared illegal, and began negotiations with the proprietors. They were now at last prepared to agree to give land, not money, in compensation, but declined to give the proportions asked for. Rawlinson stressed to a large meeting of freemen the desirability of their reaching agreement with the landowners before he issued a provisional order, and of their being willing to come some way to

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(1) Under clause 25 of the act, 8 and 9 Vict., cap. 118, application for enclosure had to be made to the commissioners by the owners of at least one-third in value of the lands in question, for the enclosure to be carried out. The essential work was to be done by an assistant commissioner, who by clause 26 had to submit to the commissioners the terms of the scheme he devised. By clause 27 they had power to proceed with the enclosure if the consent of the owners of two-thirds of the value of the land and of two-thirds of the freemen gave their assent to the scheme, but by clause 14 land near large towns (as of course in the case of the Lammas lands) could only be enclosed by consent of Parliament.

(2) Coventry Standard, 31 March, 11 August, 3 November, 10 November 1854. C.W.C. Pamphlets Collection: 'S.F.C.' op. cit., p. 16.

(3) Coventry Standard, 17 November, 24 November 1854, 20 April, 11 May 1855.

meet the landowners. He suggested as compensation seven twenty-fourths of the Lammas and one fifth of the Michaelmas. Nathaniel Poole argued the need for this slight concession, pointing out that the freemen could still reverse their decision at the final vote after the award when a two thirds vote was necessary. He was met with the united opposition of Thomas Paine and William Taunton, the veteran radical leader. In this strangest of alliances that the freemen's cause gave rise to, Paine argued that the lands should not be surrendered, and Taunton that they should be only for the proportions traditionally fought for. Only seven freemen, out of 1,200 present, voted for them. Poole's motion was carried.(1) Rawlinson issued his provisional order very soon, and within days the landowners involved and two-thirds of the freemen had given their written assent to it.(2) 'Your prudence and union in this movement', wrote Poole to the freemen, 'has given the lie to those who say that the freemen are incapable of making a bargain or conducting their own business'.(3)

The enclosure commissioners in due course recommended in their annual report the extinction of the grazing right on the 493 acres of land owned by the proprietors concerned, and the annual bill to give effect to their recommendations became law in April 1856.(4) A valuer was soon appointed, and as he undertook the complicated task of apportionment the owners of the greater part of the rest of the lands signed a second petition for enclosure; compensation in the same proportions as for the first set of lands was agreed to, and the commissioner's proposal for this second group was included in the annual enclosure act for 1857; afterwards a valuer was appointed to apportion the award. The final extinction of the grazing right on the first lot of lands was held up for the operation

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(1) Coventry Standard, 8 June, 29 June 1855.

(2) Coventry Standard, 13 July, 20 July, 3 August 1855.

(3) Coventry Standard, 27 July 1855.

(4) Coventry Standard, 29 February, 18 April 1856. P.P.: [2026] H.C. (1856) xviii: Eleventh Annual Report of the Enclosure Commissioners, pp. 4, 19. 19 and 20 Vict., cap. 11. Journals of the House of Commons, cxi (1856), p. 134.

to be carried out on both lots simultaneously, to save money.(1) Late in 1857 the last few owners of Lammas land who had so far resisted enclosure were brought to agree to it by pressure from Rawlinson, and the apportionment speedily went ahead. The last Lammas riding (Thomas Paine leading the freemen out) took place in August, and the following January the last protest against enclosure by the Freemen's Protection Association - some of whose members filled in the boundary trenches being dug round the newly surveyed plots. The enclosure was completed by May, and the first sale of disencumbered land took place in August. This was that part of the Six Closes, fronting onto Greyfriars Green, which had not been allotted to the freemen; 15,000 square yards were sold as building plots and on them were soon erected the Romanesque, Gothic and Italianate insurance offices that still stand near the Kenilworth Road traffic lights.(2)

From the 1,035 acres on which the pasture right was extinguished the freemen received 272 acres, by freehold tenure, in compensation.(3) Fifteen trustees of this land were elected in June 1858. They did not consider, of course, selling the freemen's estate; the need to hold on to it to allow the freemen to profit from future appreciations in value had long been realised. Some was let out on building leases immediately, some divided into garden allotments for which there was keen competition - there was a ballot for them in which freemen were given preference - and some (apparently the more remote portions of the estate) were let out as pasture for

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(1) Coventry Standard, 16 May, 23 May, 13 June, 11 July, 22 August, 26 September, 31 October 1856, 23 January, 6 February, 3 April, 12 June, 14 August, 11 September 1857. P.P.: [2255] H.C. (1857, Session 2) xvi: Special Report of the Enclosure Commissioners, p. 4. 20 and 21 Vict., cap 20. Journals of the House of Commons, cxii (1857), p. 388. Vigilant to the last, Wilmot brought to the town council in February 1857 a memorial from a freemen's meeting complaining that some butcher freemen had been grazing more than their due number of cattle on the lands and asking that the chamberlain (who for many years had been George Baddeley) should be reappointed each year to guarantee his efficiency. The council agreed. Coventry Standard, 30 January, 13 February 1857.

(2) Coventry Standard, 8 January, 15 January, 20 August 1858, 28 January, 13 May, 15 July, 26 August 1859. C.W.C.Pamphlets Collection, 'S.F.C.', op. cit. p. 14.

(3) Coventry Standard, 6 November 1857. C.W.C.: Award of the Inclosure Commissioners in the Matter of the Lammas and Michaelmas Lands of Coventry (Coventry, n.d.), p. 8. The land was in several portions, the largest of which was to the north of the city, near Radford: ibid., map.

the time being. The trustees rejected a suggestion that the rents received should go for the improvement of the commons so as to provide better grazing for the beasts of the butcher freemen, and opted for the charity always preferred by the freemen - pensions for the aged. The money from the estate, however, was not added to the seniority fund but used to start a separate fund from which might benefit both freemen and their widows. (Freemen alone could benefit from the original seniority fund.)(1)

While their victory over the proprietors of the Lammas lands was in its last stages the freemen won another battle over their common rights: a less important conflict, but one that showed both the loyalty they felt to their order and its privileges and their power to defend them against strong attack. For many years the Great Fair had been held on Greyfriars Green at the feast of Corpus Christi in June. In April 1858 years of discontent among the middle-class inhabitants of Hertford Street (fronting the green) over the drunkenness, noise, lewdness and dishonesty of the fair-goers came to a head. The presentation of Russian guns captured in the Crimea helped to prompt a plan for the green to be turned into a public garden with the guns on display.(2) William Wilmot presented a memorial to this effect from the inhabitants of Hertford Street to the town council; a council committee approved the plan, and suggested that the fair should be moved to Gosford Green (away from middle-class housing) and that cash compensation should be paid to the freemen for the destruction of the herbage on both greens.

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(1) Coventry Standard, 13 November 1857, letter of Nathaniel Poole, 22 July, 29 July, 5 August, 19 August, 2 September, 16 September, 30 September, 14 October, 21 October 1859. Victoria History of the County of Warwick, viii, p. 206. About 45 acres of wastes and commons were enclosed under a second award in 1875 and the freemen's estate received just over 10 acres in compensation for the extinction of the pasture right. The remaining land, including Greyfriars Green, went to the corporation. C.W.C.: Award of the Inclosure Commissioners ... Copy of the Award under the Coventry Inclosure no.2, pp. 10 et seq. By 1908 700 houses and several large factories had been built on the estate, and various portions were requisitioned by the War Office in the First World War to build houses for munition workers. The freehold of the largest parcel, of 133 acres, was acquired by the corporation for its housing estate at Radford in 1921. Almost all the land of the freemen's estate is now built on. The income from rents and investments was £15,000 in 1964, and about 600 aged freemen or widows were receiving pensions. V.C.H., Warks, viii, pp. 205 et seq.

(2) Another reason for the wish to move the fair from Greyfriars Green was the growth of traffic along Warwick Road to the railway station.

A long and confused debate followed. William Taunton attacked the hypocrisy in regarding immorality as less offensive when out of the sight of respectable citizens. Above all, the freemen's rights must not be invaded in this way without proper consultation. 'As to making the Green a pleasure-ground, the idea was all a farce. It would be a place only for nurse-maids of a petty aristocracy to resort to with their children and their perambulators.' (1) The council decided to carry out the plan nevertheless.(2)

Within days 3,000 inhabitants had signed a memorial approving the decision, and 2,000 one attacking it. Respectable citizens who wanted a quiet life were strong on the first side, the freemen on the second. The freemen's leaders Taunton, Nathaniel Poole and W.H. Gardner (a grocer) accused the 'removers' of taking memorial sheets round the schools for children to sign, and of appealing both to publicans on the grounds that there would be more room for drinking booths on Gosford Green and to the temperance men on the grounds that Gosford Green was so far away nobody would bother to go. The council, wrote Poole, had acted illegally in proposing the move to Gosford Green without getting the permission of the freemen: who would never allow the enclosure of Greyfriars Green (and the consequent destruction of their notional herbage right) without compensation in land. Thomas Paine, speaking for the freemen butchers and cattle-keepers, added that if the corporation disturbed the turf of Gosford Green they would apply for a mandamus against them.(3) Taunton addressed a large meeting of freemen on Greyfriars Green. He talked of the sacredness of freemen's rights: 'Let them be as sacred to you as Magna Carta, and this spot as Runnymede - a spot upon which we have met not only to defend our own rights, but to fight the battle of reform'.(4) Their rights must be defended at all times because, together with the status of self-employed artisans so many of them enjoyed, they were the guarantee of that political independence which made them so valuable to England. 'Ask Mr. Ellice or Mr. Turner which class was the most

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(1) Coventry Standard, 2 April 1858.

(2) Coventry Standard, 2 April 1858. See also, loc. cit., the letters of 'M.A.' arguing that the fair should be replaced by 'rational and innocent amusements' and 'M.E', to the effect that it was no more morally offensive than Coventry's theatre and public dancing rooms.

(3) Coventry Standard, 9 April, 23 April, 30 April, 14 May 1858.

(4) Coventry Standard, 21 May 1858.

independent, the freeman or the shopkeeper; who was it that wanted the ballot, the freeman or the man who had a little sugar to sell, or who had a few huxter's shops to supply?'(1)

A few days later, as council workmen staked out plots on Gosford Green for the fair, Taunton led a party of freemen down Gosford Street to the green; they chased away the workmen and pulled up the stakes. Three men were arrested and charged at the magistrates' court. They were defended by Taunton's close friend Griffin, the Leamington solicitor.(2) Taunton was also allowed to make a speech on their behalf though he had no standing in the court. The case was adjourned. Wishing to cause as much fuss as possible, Griffin and Taunton refused to offer bail but the prisoners were released nevertheless; they were met by cheering freemen outside the court. (They were eventually fined small sums.) The mayor decided that owing to the great excitement among the freemen the fair would be held in Hales Street and the Smithfield, where the corporation had a clear legal right. He could not face the risk of having to suppress a freemen's riot by (as the Standard put it) 'the swords of the military and the truncheons of the police'.(3) J.S. Whittem regretted that the mayor had given in to 'the despotism of the mob' and denounced Taunton as 'a reckless demagogue; he had headed a mob in the streets, stimulated by beer, to commit a breach of the peace'. Taunton replied that Whittem 'did not call it a mob when he accompanied the parties of O'Connell and Feargus O'Connor through the streets'.(4)

The plan to make a public garden in Greyfriars Green was for the time being abandoned.(5) Wilmot had been on the wrong side in the dispute and partly as a result was not chosen by the Freemen's Lammas Land Trustees as their solicitor - though his mental powers

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(1) loc. cit., Taunton did not mention that many freemen were shopkeepers, but he was speaking at a crucial point in a long conflict between weavers and ribbon masters.

(2) Griffin had served two years in Warwick Gaol shortly before, for perjury in the Leigh peerage case. He refused to grow his hair afterwards until the rightful Lord Leigh resided at Stoneleigh.

(3) Coventry Standard, 4 June 1858.

(4) loc. cit.

(5) It was carried out after 1875, when the freemen's pasture right was extinguished by the enclosure award of that year. The Russian guns were melted down in the Second World War and the green eviscerated by roadworks in 1967.

were in any case failing.(1) Taunton was given a testimonial of £50 by his friends at a ceremony at the Corn Exchange. In his speech he recounted his long struggle for right against might: for Corn Law repeal, the Penny Post, and parliamentary reform. 'Honest Henry Hunt', the 'blunt and eccentric William Cobbett', and the 'much to be respected Thomas Attwood' had been his exemplars. 'The creatures who creep and cringe hour by hour for the smiles of the rich, or for wordly gain, what hope can such grovelling souls expect to have in another world, after having sacrificed every principle of honour and self-respect in this.'... 'The company enjoyed themselves till midnight, when Mr. Taunton was escorted home with the Band, which was engaged for the occasion.'(2)

The freemen could defeat the city. With the city's support, they could defeat mightier enemies. Two years before Taunton spoke they had celebrated a victory over that powerful engine of covert social change, the Charity Commissioners.

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(1) Coventry Standard, 1 July, 8 July 1859.

(2) Coventry Standard, 16 July, 6 August 1858.

II

The City's Charities and the Defeat of the Charity Commission, 1856

Much the largest charity in Coventry was Sir Thomas White's. 40/70ths of the income of the charity was shared with four other boroughs, each of which took this whole proportion every fifth year.(1) Coventry's share was paid quinquennially by the feoffees (or trustees) of the Sir Thomas White's charity estates to the General Charities Trustees for the Sir Thomas White's loan fund which they administered.(2) Freemen alone had access to this loan fund: they were entitled to a £50 loan interest-free for nine years, upon proper security. The privilege was for many years more potential than actual. The borrower was required to give security for his loan, and to provide sureties. The difficulty of furnishing these safeguards had for long prevented many freemen from taking advantage of the fund; by 1833 nearly £10,000 had accumulated in it, while £7,510 was out on loan. In the same year the old corporation made access to the fund even harder. As part of its reform of the city's charities it decided, on the recommendation of George Eld, that each borrower should provide three sureties, not one - and that to end the covert use of the fund by sureties who had advanced to the nominal borrower the security he pledged, all sureties had to declare that they had no interest in the loan. This policy of requiring rigorous security was continued by the General Charities Trustees after 1836. By

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(1) The other boroughs were Leicester, Nottingham, Warwick and Northampton. The greater part of the remaining 30/70ths were paid each year to Coventry for the £4 gift.

(2) Before 1836 the old corporation had administered the entire charity. New bodies of trustees were set up in that year by the Lord Chancellor. See Chapter Four, Section I.

1854 the amount out on loan was £8,300, while the accumulated unspent loan fund amounted to £20,400.(1)

The matter was several times discussed by meetings of the freemen in the 1840s. William Taunton, David Buckney and W.H. Gardner wanted the surplus fund to be added to the seniority fund and wished to approach the Sir Thomas White's and General Charities Trustees for their co-operation in promoting a parliamentary bill, or application to the Court of Chancery, to effect this. William Wilmot agreed with them, as did 548 freemen and inhabitants who signed a supporting memorial, in 1845; so did the committee of the seniority fund. Many freemen did not: chief among them being Thomas Paine, who felt that the fund ought to be made more accessible by reducing the security asked for. The General Charities Trustees disagreed with Paine - but also with the other freemen. Several approaches to the trustees foundered on their hostility to the idea of departing from the original plan of the charity.(2) At length the differences among the freemen were resolved, but not those between them and the trustees. In 1851 two schemes were laid before the Court of Chancery: the freemen's, for the accumulated fund to be transferred to the seniority fund, and that of the General Charities and Sir Thomas White's trustees, for the permissible loan to be increased to £150. 2,700 freemen and inhabitants - and the Directors of the Poor - supported the former scheme. Master Humphrey rejected both in 1853, and urged the trustees and freemen to agree upon a scheme whereby the monies might be used to advance education in the city.(3) Meetings of freemen, in which William Taunton, Nathaniel Poole, David Sidwell and Benjamin Poole played a leading part, decided that an attempt should be made to agree with the trustees upon a joint scheme - but one in which, it was resolved, the special, privileged interests of the freemen were preserved. Negotiations were undertaken by the Seniority Fund Committee, on the freemen's behalf. By the autumn of 1855 the scheme was ready, the trustees having acceded to the freemen's plans: a submission which reflected the increasing power and self-confidence of the freemen in the 1850s - shortly to be shown once more in their victory over the Lammas

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(1) P.P.: H.C. 606 (1834) xxii, pp. 189 et seq; [2060] H.C. (1856) xxii: Third Report of the Charity Commissioners for England and Wales, Appendix, pp. 105 et seq. C.R.O.: Council Minutes, 17, 12 February 1833.

(2) Coventry Standard, 24 October, 31 October, 21 November, 5 December, 26 December 1845, 6 February 1846, 15 December 1848, 9 March, 1 June 1849.

(3) ibid., 23 May 1851, 11 February, 25 March 1853. P.P.: [2060] H.C. (1856) xxii, pp. 106 et seq.

lands. £10,000 of the accumulated fund was to be reserved for loans, £3,000 was to be spent on building a school for the female orphans of freemen, and £7,500 on endowing it. An equal sum - the residue of the accumulation - was to be transferred to the Freemen's Seniority Fund, and the future quinquennial payments to Coventry from the Sir Thomas White's estate were to go to the school. It was also suggested that the freemen might give an acre or two of land from their Lammas land allotment (when the lands were enclosed) as a site for the school. Thus the scheme retained, for the benefit of the freemen's caste alone, their loan fund. The Seniority Fund Committee and the General Charities Trustees planned to submit this scheme jointly to the Court of Chancery for its approval. But a few weeks after it was published, a rival and very different plan was declared by the Charity Commissioners.(1)

The Charity Commission had been set up by the Charitable Trusts Act of 1853, to inquire as they thought fit into the extent, nature, and objects of all charities in England and Wales, and to propose schemes for the redirection of their funds. A relatively minor scheme, which was consistent with the established case-law on charities (and in particular the Court of Chancery's adherence to the cy-près rule(2)) might be applied for to the Court of Chancery through the Attorney-General. Any schemes the commission proposed which embodied greater changes than Chancery practice could accommodate were to be laid before Parliament through the Attorney-General, and effected by statute.(3) The commission asked first for the accounts of the 40,000 charities in England and Wales, and from them selected 800 charities which their inspectors were ordered to examine closely.

> We have selected these cases for connected examination, in the expectation that we shall be enabled to approve comprehensive schemes for the more beneficial employment of their large aggregate resources, and we shall anxiously apply ourselves to the accomplishment of this purpose at as early a period as the magnitude and complication of the questions to be dealt with ... will permit.(4)

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(1) Coventry Standard, 1 April 1853, 14 July 1854, 31 August, 19 October, 26 October 1855. P.P.: [2060] H.C. (1856) xxii, p. 107.

(2) That is, the rule that any fresh purpose to which a charitable endowment might be devoted should be as near as possible to the testator's declared intention.

(3) A.S. Bishop, The Rise of a Central Authority for English Education (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 202, 212 et seq. David Owen, English Philanthropy, 1660-1960 (Cambridge, Mass, 1965), pp. 202 et seq.

(4) P.P.: H.C. 107 (1854-55) xv: Second Report of the Charity Commissioners for England and Wales, p. 4.

Much the most important of these selected charities were those of Coventry and Warwick; the others were certain charities in the city of London, Dulwich College, and the Sherburn Hospital in Durham.(1) Walter Skirrow, the commission's inspector, was busy in Coventry in 1855, which led to murmurs in the city that a Whitehall plot was afoot to misappropriate the funds of the city's charities.(2)

Skirrow's draft scheme was published in December 1855. It brought under view the charities administered by the Church and General Municipal trustees, the feoffees of Sir Thomas White's estates, and the trustees of certain small charities not controlled by these bodies. The scheme proposed to tackle the problem posed by the free grammar school. The headmastership was united with, and provided the living for, the rectorship of St. John's; the two offices were incompatible and needed to be separated, but it was impossible to provide for the latter except by diminishing the school estate - which was in any case, and most importantly, inadequate to finance the much larger secondary school that the commission thought was needed by the city.(3) The scheme recommended

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(1) loc. cit. Five other groups of charities, of which those of the Grammar School and the Sir Thomas White's charity of Nottingham, and Spalding Grammar School were the most important, were soon afterwards brought under close scrutiny with a view to reorganisation. P.P.: [2060] H.C. (1856) xxii, p. 7.

(2) Coventry Standard, 29 June, 31 August 1855.

(3) After the Municipal Corporations Act, control of the grammar school was transferred to the Church Charities Trustees, who ran it under the scheme approved by the old corporation in 1832. Sheepshanks remained headmaster, being joined as usher in 1841 by the Rev. William Drake. By the 1850s there was much dissatisfaction in the city at the state of the school. Its numbers were small, its almost exclusively classical curriculum attracting few. Drake drew up a scheme which the trustees approved at the end of 1852, for the division of the school into 'classical' and 'commercial' departments; Sheepshanks remained in charge of the former, Drake taking over the latter: 'I am quite as ready to teach arithmetic and geography, as Thucydides and Homer'. The classical department languished, the commercial boomed: by 1854 there were five boys in the former, eighty-eight in the latter. This increased tensions already existing between the two masters. Under the 1852 scheme, freemen's sons retained the privilege, which they had enjoyed immemorially, of an education at lower cost than the sons of non-freemen. Freemen's sons paid (in addition to the entrance fee of 37s.6d.) merely 34s. a year. The sons of non-freemen paid £10.10s. a year for the classical department, and £6.6s. for the commercial. Coventry Standard, 8 October, 26 November, 24 December 1852, 26 June 1853. P.P.: [2060] H.C. (1856) xxii, p. 102. Charity Commission Records: Registered File 216235/3, General Municipal Charities, Coventry, Sheepshanks to W. Skirrow, 21 February 1856, Drake to Skirrow, 21 February 1856. One of Sheepshanks' pupils in the 1850s was the young John Fisher - later Admiral of the Fleet. H. McLachlan, Alexander Gordon (Manchester, 1932), p. 9.

that the two offices should be separated(1), that the rector's stipend should be provided out of school estate, and that to the small school estate that would then remain (yielding at most £700) should be added £10,000 from the accumulated loan fund of Sir Thomas White's charity. This would permit enlarged buildings and numbers. The school was to remain a 'secondary' school, taking boys from 8 to 18, with 'classical' and 'commercial' courses: the scheme specified a host of subjects, from Greek to book-keeping, which were to be taught there. A radical departure from past practice was that the Church Charities Trustees (who were to remain in charge of the school) were now to be empowered to charge higher fees than previously for the sons of freemen - though those that might be charged for the sons of other inhabitants were even higher, and those for the sons of outsiders higher still.(2) £7,500 from the accumulated loan fund was to be used to endow an industrial school for 'girls of the working, labouring, and other poorer classes'.(3) The pupils might be the daughters of freemen or mere inhabitants, though freemen's daughters would have the preference in admission and would not have to pay the fees (of 16s. or 24s. a year) obligatory for the others. £3,000 from the loan fund was to be used to endow a ward in the Coventry and Warwickshire Hospital for the benefit primarily of the sons of freemen.(4) The balance of the fund - £10,000 including the sum then out on loan - was to continue as a loan fund, for freemen.

The funds of eight large charities were in the aggregate almost entirely devoted to doles for the poor of the city, over £2,000 being disbursed in this way. The largest of these charities was Sir Thomas White's £4 gift charity, annually distributed from the income of the 24/70ths, which yielded £911 in 1853. After 1836, when the General Charities Trustees took over the administration of the charity from the old corporation, it was distributed to men who

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(1) Also, the headmaster, Sheepshanks, was to continue as rector and the usher, Drake, was to succeed him as headmaster.

(2) The fees proposed were £4 or £5 a year for freemen's sons, according to age; for the sons of other inhabitants - £5 or £6; for the sons of non-Coventrians - £8 or £10. Under the scheme, the staff were to be allowed to take boarders, in their homes.

(3) The curriculum was to be that used in elementary schools of the time, with a greater emphasis on dressmaking and laundering - which might indeed be undertaken by the pupils for the profit of the school.

(4) It was to be called Sir Thomas White's ward.

had been residents for at least five years and householders for one, and who had not received parochial relief during that year; naturally, many recipients were freemen. It was not given to the same person more than once in ten years.(1) 4/70ths of the income of the Sir Thomas White's bequest were annually given to the General Charities Trustees for disposal in private charity among the poor generally of the city; £151 were so spent in 1853. Almost £1,000 from seven other charities were annually distributed to the poor generally in doles varying between 6s.8d. and £2.(2) The balance of the funds of these charities was devoted to relief in kind, annuities, supporting apprentices, and fees for sermons. The commission recommended that the funds for part of these specified benefits, and for all the dole disbursements, should be paid into a General Charitable Fund.(3) It was expected that the annual income of this would total over £2,000, just over half coming from the Sir Thomas White's charity. £450 was to be spent in gifts in kind - clothing, fuel, medicines - and small annuities among the deserving poor; £300 was to go to the Coventry and Warwickshire Hospital to finance the freemen's ward; not more than £500 was to be used to provide night classes and lectures in 'general and useful instruction and knowledge'. There was also to be a small gift of £10 to the Provident Dispensary - again primarily for the benefit of freemen. The residue - over £700 - was to be used to support the girls' industrial school.(4)

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(1) Before 1836 the old corporation had distributed the £4 gift to freemen invariably, though legally all householders not receiving poor relief were eligible. In 1831 the old corporation had decided on the ten-year restriction - retained by the trustees after 1836. See Chapter One, and Chapter Four, Section I.

(2) These charities were Bird's, Crow's, Jeliff's, Jesson's, Wale's, Smith's and Moore's. The first five were administered by the General Charities Trustees and the last two by private trustees.

(3) It also recommended that Wheatley's loan charity - whose small funds had since 1836 been held by the city council and had not been used for loans - should be made over to the General Charitable Fund. From about thirty smaller charities there was also distributed each year (besides £100 for apprenticing boys) more than £300 in doles, pensions, bread, coals and clothing; the beneficiaries were sometimes the poor generally, sometimes widows, the adherents of one faith, or the inhabitants of one parish or street. See on these charities, V.C.H. Warks, viii, pp. 399 et seq. The Charity Commission did not plan to appropriate the funds of these charities for its scheme.

(4) Charity Commission Records: Registered File 216235/3: General Municipal Charities, Coventry, draft scheme of 21 December 1855. The discrepancy in the total amounts to be disposed, between the two schemes (£28,000 in the case of the freemen's and £30,500 in the case of the Charity Commission's) was due to the freemen's omitting from consideration the next quinquennial payment (in 1855) to the loan fund, while also taking into account the presumed costs of their Chancery action.

The freemen had not of course mentioned in their scheme the charities to which they did not have an exclusive entitlement. Where the two schemes touched the same matter - the Sir Thomas White's loan fund - there were essential differences: above all, the freemen's scheme envisaged their loan monies being used, in future, as they had been for so long, for the sole benefit of their caste, whereas in the other the town as a whole was also to be a beneficiary. Nevertheless, the Charity Commission's scheme did continue a measure of privilege for the freemen: the hospital ward, the lower fees at the grammar school, the exemption from fees and priority of entry to the girls' school. This degree of preferential consideration, and the desirability of the objects of the Charity Commission's scheme - the enlargement of the grammar school and the hospital, and the foundation of the girls' school - might have been expected to lead to considerable support for the scheme in the city. But what is remarkable is that there was very little.

Freemen of all degrees of wealth attended in force a meeting of protest in St. Mary's Hall, called by the committee of the seniority fund. J.S. Whittem took the chair. All cursed the Charity Commission's scheme. The radical William Taunton denounced the plan to end the alms charities:

> Cases deserving commiseration ... there ever would be until some great and organic change took place in the constitution of society, and in his opinion to exclude the principle of charity from amongst us would be to blot out one of the finest features in the existing system of humanity.(1)

The paternalist ribbon master Abijah Hill Pears agreed: and added that the only part of the commission's scheme he liked was the proposal for a girls' school - and that, he thought, should be exclusively for the daughters of freemen. Nathaniel Poole and W.H. Gardner denounced the plan to enlarge the grammar school with freemen's money and then ask them to pay fees to send their sons to it. The great majority of freemen could not afford them: and if they could, they would not want the education provided by it. Gardner said:

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(1) Coventry Standard, 11 January 1856. See also Chapter Nine, Section II, for a discussion of the place of the dole charities in relieving poverty.

> The proposition which their scheme included for the establishment of a girls' school, showed that the freemen were not insensible to the importance of education, but they had no idea of giving, and it was not intended to give, what was called a classical education to the children of weavers and watchmakers. What they required was, an education which would qualify their sons to become good mechanics and men of business, and their daughters good wives and mothers.(1)

From the chair, J.S. Whittem concurred, attacking as robbery of the poor the plan to finance the grammar school with freemen's money. If a boys' school were provided at all from the loan fund, it should be the sort of school the freemen would find useful. He warned the freemen not to accept compensation in money for their Lammas right: if they did, that would be expropriated next. Resolutions calling for the withdrawal of the commission's scheme and the execution of the freemen's were passed unanimously, and a memorial embodying them attracted 2,000 signatures in a week.(2)

Fifty leading citizens called upon the mayor to convene a town's meeting.(3) This too was held in St. Mary's Hall, with the mayor in the chair. William Wilmot described the scheme as an 'unjust attempt to alienate the property of the poor'.(4) Whittem and Charles Woodcock agreed - while the latter, an aged reactionary Tory, predicted a gloomy future for the rights of property and the constitutional liberties of Englishmen if this example of centralising despotism, on the continental model, were to go through. Several Church Charities Trustees present disavowed any desire for the scheme that would benefit so much the school in their care - and declared that its present endowment was quite sufficient for the changes they wished to implement.(5) Woodcock, Charles Dresser, Edward Goode and William Taunton moved resolutions (which were carried unanimously) in favour of the freemen's scheme and against the other, which was 'unjust in principle and calculated to shake all public faith in the preservation of constitutional rights,

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(1) loc. cit.

(2) Coventry Standard, 11 January, 18 January 1856.

(3) Charity Commission Records: Registered File 216235/3, broadside of 3 January 1856.

(4) Coventry Standard, 11 January 1856.

(5) The Church Charities Trustees had already emphatically declared these opinions to the scheme's authors: Charity Commission Records: loc. cit., memorial of Church Charities Trustees, 2 January 1856.

and especially injurious, inasmuch as the changes contemplated are for the benefit of the wealthier classes at the expense of the poor'.(1) The town council unanimously passed a similar memorial, adding that

> when a charity has been founded by will or other solemn legal assurance for the benefit, in a specific manner, of a certain class of individuals, and the income of such charity has increased and become more than adequate for the specific purposes mentioned, such increase should be applied in some other manner for the benefit of the class of persons for whom the charity was originally founded, and not for the advantage of a class of persons and objects totally different to those intended.(2)

In other words, charities for the poor should continue for their benefit, and likewise those intended for the freemen. Exactly the same point was made by the General Charities Trustees in their most detailed protest; they could find very little good in the scheme they were expected to help administer. As a whole it was 'peculiarly obnoxious'; 'the proposed High School is calculated to benefit only the children of persons in better circumstances than the freemen of Coventry'; the abolition of alms was 'unnecessary and unfeeling'. They expressed support for the freemen's scheme, in particular the plan to benefit the seniority fund, by which 'an aged freeman may obtain assistance without compromise of his independence of position or feeling'.(3) Hardly anyone favoured the commission's scheme. The headmaster and usher of the grammar school did, apart from some details of their proposed stipends. H.J. Davis, secretary to the Church Charities Trustees, wrote to Skirrow that he personally approved of the scheme - but secretly and confidentially, lest his trustees should find out.(4) Charles Bray, friend to education and foe to freemen and doles, praised the

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(1) Charity Commission Records: Registered File 216235/3, memorial of the citizens and inhabitants of Coventry, January 1856. See also Coventry Standard, loc. cit.

(2) Charity Commission Records, loc. cit., memorial of the mayor, aldermen and burgesses of Coventry, 8 January 1856. See also Coventry Standard, loc. cit.

(3) Charity Commission Records, loc. cit., memorial of the General Charities Trustees, 16 January 1856. The Directors of the Poor also petitioned against the scheme - on the grounds that the alms distributed in the city kept the poor rate low. The trustees of Moore's and Smith's charities also protested, on the grounds that their funds, the legacies of dissenters and used for the benefit of the poor 'irrespective of creed' would under the scheme be used to support the grammar school, with an Anglican bias. loc. cit., memorials of January 1856.

(4) loc. cit., Thomas Sheepshanks to Charity Commission, memorandum of January and letter of 9 February 1856, William Drake to Charity Commission, 22 January and 26 January 1856, H.J. Davis to Skirrow, 23 February 1856.

scheme in the Herald(1); which drew from the Standard the retort that 'the scheme is so scandalous in itself, that there is only one party in Coventry that has openly entered on its advocacy, and that is the Proprietor of the Coventry Herald, whose sanity is sometimes doubted, as well it may be, when he gets on one of his hobbies'.(2)

The commissioners agreed to see deputations from the corporation, both sets of charity trustees, and the freemen; but after hearing all their arguments decided nevertheless to go ahead with an application for a parliamentary bill to implement it, as slightly amended on points of detail which in no way met the criticisms of the city on its principles.(3) These the commissioners rejected because (as they said in their report) they disliked dole charities - 'direct and somewhat indiscriminate pecuniary distribution among the inhabitants' - and that they preferred, to the benefit of exclusive groups of interested parties, the advancement and benefit of the entire town by the scheme proposed - and in particular the educational plan, its main feature being the enlarged grammar school 'in which instruction of a superior description may be afforded'. To those who argued that Sir Thomas White's wishes were flouted by redirecting the loan fund the commissioners replied (justifiably) that he was not a party to the trust deed of 1551 which allocated to freemen's loans the funds he had left for the good of the 'commonwealth' of the city. To those who asked that if education were the

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(1) Coventry Herald, 11 January, 8 February, 29 February 1856.

(2) Coventry Standard, 18 January 1856. The Standard added that 'not a farthing is given to the Seniority Fund. Such is Whig Honesty and Whig Morality. The highwayman and the burglar will be at no loss to find an apology in this scheme.' ibid., 29 February 1856. See also the indignant letters from freemen in ibid., 4 January, 7 March, 20 March, 4 April 1856. The Coventry Weekly Times also opposed the scheme strongly, and supported the freemen's plan for the White loan fund. It was not against using some of its monies for a school, but not 'a High School for classical learning, with university foundations'. 2 January, 9 January, 16 January, 23 January, 2 March 1856.

(3) Charity Commission Records, loc. cit., Charity Commission to T.B. Troughton, 4 Eebruary, 8 February, 27 February 1856, Charity Commission to H.J. Davis, 4 February, 8 February, 27 February 1856. Coventry Standard, 29 February, 11 April 1856. The amended scheme of 27 February 1856 is in MS in Charity Commission Records, loc. cit. It increased the number of annuities to be paid to the aged, provided for a very small amount of cash to be spent on doles, and reduced the capital to be given to the hospital to £2,500 and the annual sum to £250.

purpose to which the charity funds were allocated they should be used to endow elementary schools for the poor the commissioners replied that there were enough National schools already 'without resorting to the charitable endowments of the town for the purpose'.(1)

The meetings of freemen and inhabitants that followed this news were even more indignant, and promised continued struggle against the robbery, partiality and injustice of the scheme.(2) The city's parliamentary friends brought the matter up in a debate on supply for the Charity Commission in June. William Williams proposed a reduction in its vote on the grounds that it was 'acting in opposition to the wishes of the people and doing mischief'.(3) The scheme for the Coventry charities submitted to Chancery had the support of nearly all the city: the commission's scheme, none. Paxton spoke as strongly. J.W. Henley, member for Oxfordshire, agreed with them. William's motion was lost but the victory was won. The Charity Commission dropped the Coventry charities from its legislative programme and proceeded with bills for five schemes elsewhere.(4) These they described as minor, as compared with those dropped. But even one of these, that for Sherburn Hospital, came under such heavy attack in the Lords that the commissioners dropped it. Their bill for another relatively minor charity(5) the following session also had an unhappy fate; a select committee reported that its scheme ought rightly to have been channelled

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(1) P.P.: [2060] H.C. (1856) xxii, pp. 8 et seq, 116 et seq.

(2) Coventry Standard, 14 March, 18 April 1856.

(3) Parliamentary Debates, third series, cxlii (1856), p. 857.

(4) ibid., pp. 857 et seq. Coventry Standard, 4 July 1856. The only other charities to be mentioned in the debate as being badly treated by the commission were those of Spalding, Lincolnshire - also scheduled for reorganisation. The bill for these was also not entered upon. Nor was that for the Nottingham charities. Both Sheepshanks and Drake resigned from the grammar school in 1857, the former remaining as rector of St. John's. The Charity Commission confirmed a plan made by the Church Charity Trustees to divide the parochial benefice from the school. Its endowment remained small, as did the school; in 1865 there were only 54 boys, of whom 34 were sons of freemen enjoying near-gratuitous education. Coventry Standard, 5 June, 10 July, 31 July 1857. P.P.: [3320] H.C. (1864) xviii: Eleventh Report of the Charity Commissioners, p. 7; [3966 - XIV] H.C. (1867-68) xxviii, Part XII: Report of the Schools' Inquiry Commission: Special Reports of Assistant Commissioners, West Midland Division, pp. 694 et seq. The school was greatly enlarged after 1878, the freemen retaining an advantage in fees until the 1960s.

(5) The Hospital of St. Mary Magdalen, Newcastle on Tyne.

through Chancery. The commission found reorganisation by statute too difficult and after 1858 made no further applications.(1) One problem was that the commission lacked direct ministerial representation in parliament, and thus close support.(2) So even a scheme for a quite minor charity could be stopped by the action of interested parties. The parliamentary victory could have been achieved without the support of the city: the significance of the battle is that it reveals that the freemen and the poor of Coventry had that support.

After the Charity Commission dropped its plan for the complete restructuring of the city's charities the General Charities Trustees and the Seniority Fund Committee returned to their scheme of 1855 for the fruitful employment of the surplus of Sir Thomas White's loan fund. This was submitted to the Court of Chancery for consideration. Chancery accepted the scheme in 1860, almost in its entirety. It agreed that £10,000 should be reserved for freemen's loans, that £10,500 should be spent on building and endowing an industrial school for the daughters of deceased freemen, and that future quinquennial payments to Coventry (the '40/70ths') should also go to support the school. It disagreed with the proposal that the remaining surplus (more than £7,000) should be added to the seniority fund, and suggested instead that a separate fund should be set up to provide pensions of 6s. a week for freemen, or freemen's sons, suffering from permanent disability, such as blindness. These pensions were not to be held in addition to pensions from the seniority fund. It was perhaps sensible to vary the original scheme in this way so that other groups of freemen in need might be aided, in addition to the aged who were alone provided for by the seniority principle. Certainly in its revised form the scheme did not depart from the essential principle that the loan monies should be used for the advantage of freemen only. Certainly, too, it was as welcome to the freemen as the Charity Commission's scheme had been unpopular. It was accepted by a meeting of freemen in the summer of 1860 and

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(1) P.P.: [2060] H.C. (1856) xxii, p. 8; [2187] H.C. (1857 - Session I) iii: Fourth Report of the Charity Commissioners, p. 5; [2346] H.C. (1857-58) xxiii: Fifth Report of the Charity Commissioners, pp. 4 et seq; [2484] H.C. (1859) xii: Sixth Report of the Charity Commissioners, p. 4. Journals of the House of Commons, cxi (1856), pp. 295 et seq; cxiii (1857-58), pp. 325 et seq.

(2) A.S. Bishop, op. cit., pp. 213 et seq.

came into operation the following year. (1)

Yet the final victory of 1860 was largely unremarked in the city. This is not surprising. At the time the scheme was announced the city's attention was elsewhere. Masters and men in the ribbon trade were bitterly divided by an intense struggle for industrial power. Their battle stands in contrast with the unity that rich and poor had shown in fighting for the freemen's cause four years before.

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(1) Coventry Standard, 9 September 1859, 20 July, 27 July 1860. Benjamin Poole, Coventry: its History and Antiquities (London, 1870), pp. 278 et seq, 307. After deducting the cost of the Chancery action, £7,215 remained as the principal of the Sir Thomas White's Pension Fund. The girls' school - Sir Thomas White's - opened in 1865; it closed in 1919. The Coventry General Municipal Charities were by a scheme of 1896 consolidated and divided into four branches, for loans, pensions, education and alms. Within these categories, however, the freemen's funds still have a separate place. Freemen still enjoy interest-free loans (the amount now being £100) from the Sir Thomas White's loan-fund reserved in 1861. In 1961 more than £15,000 was on loan from the £26,000 to which the fund had grown. From the endowment of the girls' school of 1865 there was created in 1921 the Sir Thomas White's Educational Foundation, which now provides grants for higher education, and especially postgraduate scholarships; the sons and daughters of freemen enjoy priority for these. See V.C.H. Warks, viii, pp. 404 et seq.

CHAPTER NINE

THE RELIEF OF THE POOR

I

The Poor Law

There were three periods in poor law policy in Coventry: the generous phase under the local act, lasting until about 1830; a period of economy and retrenchment, again under the local act, until 1844; and, finally, a period in which even greater economy was enforced after 1844 when Coventry's local system was assimilated into the national pattern.

The two parishes of St. Michael and Holy Trinity were united for poor law purposes by an act of 1801. Included in St. Michael's under this head was the parish of St. John - which had been separated from it only in 1734 and then not for poor law purposes. The entire area of the 'city and suburbs', and much land outside it, was thus for poor relief brought in 1801 under one administration: eighteen 'directors', elected from among their number by the 'guardians', citizens possessing freehold property worth at least £50 a year, or rated to the poor at £20 a year at least. An analysis of the occupations of the men chosen as directors for St. Michael's(1) between 1821 and 1860 is given in Table VIII.

(1) Lists of directors for Holy Trinity do not seem to exist. The local act (L & P, 41 Geo. III, cap. 62: An Act for the better Relief and Employment of the Poor in Coventry) provided that 10 directors were to be elected by the guardians of St. Michael, and 8 by those of Holy Trinity, the smaller parish; each parish was to choose half its complement every year, and directors were to serve for two years; every year, half the board thus retired. The two parishes were to

cont ...

Interpretation is difficult, since their occupations included many of very various degrees of affluence - grocers, chemists, and ribbon and watch manufacturers. Yet when all qualifications are made, the impression is very strong that the directors consisted almost entirely of men of wealth and position, by local standards, as one would expect from their narrow and exclusive constituency. There was only a handful of men who on the most generous interpretation could have been artisans: and the classes of artisan who bulked so large in the city and its commercial directories - weavers and watchmakers - appear to have been totally unrepresented.

In their first thirty years the directors pursued a paternalist and generous policy. During the French war, the record of their proceedings is spattered with regrets at their inability to reconcile two contradictory aims: to keep the poor rate low, and to succour those thrown into poverty by seasonal and periodic slumps in the ribbon trade (like that of 1808), the high cost of bread (as in 1810), the deaths on militia service of breadwinners, and epidemic disease.(1) The high poor rates for these years show that the first of the directors' aims was not satisfied. After the war the rates rose even higher, in the slump of 1816, 1817 and 1818 in the ribbon trade.(2) Early in 1817 there were 1104 casual outpoor families(3) - said by the town clerk to total 6000 persons. At the same time, there were 517 in the house of industry.(4) There were fewer ratepayers in the city than paupers: only 1,110 of the city's 3,510 houses were rated to the poor. Many of them could

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(1) cont.
be jointly responsible for all their poor and there was to be a common poor relief fund: but the act laid down that St. Michael's was to bear two-thirds of the total burden, and Holy Trinity one-third. This was unfair to St. Michael's - despite its greater size - and explains why its rates were always larger. Its guardians often demanded equalisation of the burden between the two parishes. See, for example: P.R.O.: M.H. 12/13380, Herbert Dewes to Poor Law Board, 24 September 1855.

(1) C.R.O.: Proceedings of the Guardians of the Poor for St. Michael, pp. 16 to 77, passim. This book, despite its title, in fact consists almost entirely of the annual reports of the directors of the poor for both parishes.

(2) See Appendix I for the poor law accounts between 1810 and 1861, and for the statistical details of poor relief mentioned in this chapter, unless another source is cited.

(3) The able-bodied and those dependent upon them. The aged and the chronically sick were the 'permanent' outpoor.

(4) This was the medieval house of the Whitefriars, bought and restored by the directors in 1803. The old parochial workhouses were then closed. C.R.O.: Proceedings of the Guardians, p. 10. The house is now the city's industrial museum.

TABLE VIII. Occupations of the directors of the poor for the parish of St. Michael, 1821-1860(1)

	1821-30	1831-40	1841-50	1851-60	Total	Net Total(2)
appraiser	1				1	1
architect			1		1	1
baker and flour dealers	1	1	3	3	8	6
bankers	3	2			5	4
brazier				1	1	1
brewers and maltsters	1	1	1		3	4
brush maker	1				1	1
chemists and druggists	1	1	1	4	7	7
china and glass dealer			1		1	1
clerk				1	1	1
coach proprietor		2			2	2
corn miller		1	1		2	2
drapers, haber-dashers, & tailors		6	3	5	14	13
engraver				1	1	1
farmer		2			1	1
gentlemen	4	3			7	5
greengrocer				1	1	1
grocers and victuallers	3	3	8	6	20	18
hat manufacturer		1			1	1
innkeeper				1	1	1
ironmonger	1		1		2	2
iron and brass founder				1	1	1
totals carried fwd.	16	23	20	24	83	75

TABLE VIII continued:

	1821-30	1831-40	1841-50	1851-60	Total	Net Total
nurserymen and seedsman	1	1	1		3	3
oil merchant			1		1	1
plasterer and colourman			2		2	2
plumber	1				1	1
printers, book-sellers	3	1		1	5	5
railway clerk				1	1	1
saddlers and harness makers	1		1		2	2
salt merchant		1			1	1
silk dyers	4		1	1	6	4
silkmen	1	3	1	1	6	6
silk ribbon manufacturers	15	10	13	10	48	46
solicitors	1	1			2	2
stone mason		1			1	1
stuff merchant	2				2	1
surgeon		1			1	1
surveyor				1	1	1
tanners, curriers, leather sellers	1	1	2		4	4
watch manufacturers	1	4	5	7	17	16
wine and spirit merchants	1	1	2	1	5	5
occupation unknown	2	2	1	3	8	8
	50	50	50	50	200	186

(1) Sources of table: C.R.O.: Proceedings of the Guardians of the Poor for the Parish of St. Michael, 1801-1861, and for occupations, the following directories: Pigot and Co's London and Provincial New Commercial Directory (Manchester, 1822), West, History and Directory of Warwickshire (London 1830), F. White and Co., History, Gazetteer and Directory of Warwickshire (Sheffield, 1850), Kelly's Post Office Directory for Birmingham and Warwickshire, (London, 1845 et seq), Lascelles and Co's Directory and Gazetteer of the City of Coventry (Coventry, 1850).

(2) The gross totals in the table include, for each occasion they were chosen, directors elected more than once. The net totals exclude each period of service after the first. In the period in question, only two directors served more than twice - Charles Lilly and Thomas Dalton, three times each.

not afford to pay the poor rate and 'craved' relief from payment, which the directors had to allow. As a result, the poor rate rose even higher for those who could pay. It was 19s. for St. Michael's in 1817, and nearly 14s. for Holy Trinity, while the contiguous agricultural parish of Stivichall had a rate of less than 1s. The directors complained of the 'extreme pressure of the times' and proposed that the cost of maintaining the poor should fall upon a national fund, or upon groups of parishes so that agricultural ones should share the burdens of the industrial parishes. They suggested that the poor rate burden should be equalised over the county of the city, or even beyond it.(1) Nothing more was heard of this suggestion. In the 1820s the poor rate dropped, as times improved in the ribbon trade, but the disastrous slump of 1829 and 1830 created a crisis again. In 1829 the directors spent £20,636; the very high poor rates raised only £16,089; the difference was borrowed from the directors' bank.(2)

This great expenditure was not due to corruption or maladministration: the directors and their servants were diligent and honest; accounts were properly kept. It was the result of a liberal policy of poor relief, which pushed up costs greatly at times of crisis.(3) Food in the workhouse was good in quantity and quality; in 1817 the cost of maintaining each indoor pauper was about 4s.6d. a week and they lived better inside the house than out; thirteen years later they were given, it was said, 'a bellyful and no stints'.(4) Inmates were freely allowed into the town; there was no harsh

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(1) P.P.: H.C. 462 (1817) vi: Report from the Select Committee on the Poor Laws, with the Minutes of Evidence, pp. 139 et seq. C.R.O.: Proceedings of the Guardians, p. 104.

(2) C.R.O.: Proceedings of the Guardians of the Poor, pp. 158, 162.

(3) Significantly, the director with the longest service in these years of generosity was Charles Lilly, the paternalist retired ribbon master. He served between 1818 and 1822, 1823 and 1827, and 1828 and 1830. During the 1820s he also seems to have been the chairman of the board. Lilly's retirement from the board (soon followed by his death) coincided with the economising policy of 1830 onwards. C.R.O.: Proceedings of the Guardians of the Poor, pp. 102 et seq. By clause 7 of the local act, a director who had served four years continuously was not eligible for further re-election until after the lapse of one year: Lilly served as much as he could.

(4) P.R.O.: M.H. 12/13377: Poor Law Union Papers, Coventry 1834-1843. Edward Gulson to George Nicholls, 24 September 1834.

discipline. There was work at silk-throwing at the house of industry,(1) but inmates were not compelled to undertake it; it was not used as a labour test for relief. The house was regarded as a haven by tramps on the Liverpool-London road; not put to any labour-test, they flocked to it and their support cost the Coventry ratepayers between £400 and £600 a year.(2)

But to both the casual and the permanent poor relief was more often given outdoors than in the house. Relief was in money, not kind. It was paid to able-bodied men without children only if they were unemployed or at best very occasionally employed, and not in supplementation of regular earnings: but paid to men with children whether they were employed or not.(3) Outdoor relief was sometimes given to able-bodied men in return for work on the roads, or at street cleaning - but not always, and 'as supernumaries, merely for the sake of giving employment to them'.(4) It was thus not a test of fitness for relief. Relief payments were not made in accordance with a fixed and invariable scale; by a strained interpretation of clause 53 of their local act individual directors could and did order relief for paupers without reference to the board as a whole and this led to some being paid while others were not and to variations in payment to people whose circumstances were identical.(5) But even at their most generous payments were not lavish; indeed they could not be without making parochial bankruptcy, already risked in times of crisis, certain. Weekly payments

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(1) Soon after the house of industry was opened the knitting of silk and cotton stockings began; this failed and was replaced in 1809 by the knitting of worsted stockings, for which 11 frames were bought. This lost money and was ended in 1812; soon after an outside contractor began using pauper labour to throw silk. C.R.O.: Proceedings of the Guardians of the Poor, pp. 49, 71, 84. P.P.: H.C. 400 (1818) v, p. 189.

(2) For this paragraph, see P.P.: H.C. 400 (1818) v: Report and Minutes of Evidence of the Lords Committee on the Poor Laws, pp. 189 et seq; H.C. 44 (1834) xxix: Report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws, Appendix A, Part II, Reports of Assistant Commissioners, pp. 22a et seq; H.C. 145 (1837-38) xviii, Part I: Fifth Report of the Select Committee on the Poor Law Amendment Act, p. 22.

(3) P.R.O.: M.H. 12/13377, Statement of Casual Outpoor, 10 March 1830. P.P.: H.C. 462 (1817) vi, p. 141. Thus in effect the Coventry parishes paid 'family allowances', as did at this time 61% of parishes in 'Speenhamland' counties. See Mark Blaug, 'The Poor Law Report Reexamined', Journal of Economic History, xxiv (1964).

(4) P.P.: H.C. 462 (1817) vi, p. 142. See also P.R.O.: M.H. 12/13377, Marginal MS note by Edward Gulson on printed report of the Directors of the Poor for 1833.

(5) P.P.: H.C. 138 (1837-38) xviii, Part I: Second Report from the Select Committee on the Poor Law Amendment Act, pp. 17, 20; H.C. 140 (1837-38) xviii, Part I: Third Report of the S.C. ..., p. 25; [468] H.C. (1843) xxi: Ninth Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners, p. 152.

to unemployed single men varied in 1830 (when detailed figures are first available) from 1s.6d. to 4s. a week; they never exceeded 4s. and 2s. was the usual rate. James Lax, an unemployed weaver with eight children at home and one at work earning 2s.6d., was paid 10s. a week poor relief. Samuel Smith, earning 10s. a week, was paid 5s. a week for his six children. Joseph Smith, earning 9s. at weaving, was paid 4s. for his seven children. John Maloney, an unemployed ribbon weaver with six children and no earnings, was paid 4s.6d.(1)

A policy of giving relief widely and sometimes generously (though often capriciously) in periods of crisis produced the great deficit and high poor rates of 1830. A remedy had to be found. In April 1830 Edward Gulson was elected a director for Holy Trinity. (2) He, with some other directors, began a campaign of economy. 'I made it in fact,' said Gulson, 'if you will allow me to use the word, a hobby; I attended at the place four or five times a week'. (3) But 'I wish particularly to guard myself against the charge of egotism; I was greatly assisted by others; we did it together'. (4) The reformers were opposed by some other directors, and the changes Gulson wished for were introduced less rapidly, fully and lastingly than he wished.(5) Gulson complained against what he

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(1) P.R.O.: M.H. 12/13377, Statement of Casual Outpoor, 10 March 1830, pp. 4, 5.

(2) P.P.: H.C. 140 (1837-38) xviii, Part I, p. 25. Gulson was a 'fellmonger, leather dresser, parchment and glue maker, and dyer, Hill Street'. West, op. cit., p. 772.

(3) P.P.: H.C. 136 (1837-38) xviii, Part I: First Report from the Select Committee on the Poor Law Amendment Act, p. 1.

(4) P.P.: H.C. 138 (1837-38) xviii, Part I, p. 18. See also P.P.: [468] H.C. (1843) xxi, p. 156.

(5) Thus when C.P. Villiers, assistant commissioner for the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws, visited Coventry early in 1832, he was told by the director who conducted him round the workhouse 'that his object was to render it "a comfortable asylum for the poor, and not, as some directors might wish, a bug-bear, to deter them from seeking relief"'. P.P.: H.C. 44 (1834) xxix, Appendix A, p. 22a. One proposal put forward by the economy party in 1830 to spread the rate burden more widely was in fact defeated far more completely than their plans to reduce poor relief. This was a proposal that the very large amount of 'cravings' by poor ratepayers (which raised of course the burden on those who did pay) should be reduced by transferring the duty of payment from tenants to the landlords of small properties. This would have required a special act of Parliament to alter the terms of the act of 1801. A bitter wrangle over the plan took place at a meeting of the Guardians in October 1830. Charles Lilly argued that the plan would mean a tax on the poor, who should not be expected to pay. The proposal to apply for an act was carried by the casting vote of the chairman, Viscount Hood. But in unaccustomed alliance, T.B. Troughton and John Carter got the meeting to agree to parishioners'

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called the 'mischievously profuse allowance to the indoor paupers' and against the opposition of some directors got a reduction of the dietary so that by 1833 the per capita cost per week for food in the house was 2s.5d. only.(1) In an attempt to deter men from seeking relief Gordon and his colleagues insisted, in 1831, on young able-bodied childless men entering the house for it(2), and on setting able-bodied male paupers, whether in the house or not, to labour at a corn-mill that they introduced into it to test their need for relief.(3) This had its most dramatic effect on the tramps: forced to grind corn before breakfast, they stayed away from the Coventry workhouse and the costs of their maintenance fell by 90% in one year.(4)

Most significant in its effect was the reduction in payments for outdoor relief. Lists of the casual outpoor, with details of their dependants and earnings, were printed and circulated to rate-payers, who scrutinised them and reported to the directors cases of fraud or lack of need. Many paupers were thus struck off the lists. (5) More stringent rules were applied for relief; it was denied,

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(5) cont.
meetings to consider the matter further. At these the proposal was postponed (and thus killed) by large majorities, poor 'craving' ratepayers joining with landlords who did not want to become rate-collectors. At St. Michael's meeting R.K. Rotherham argued to no effect that the Directors' aim was to ensure that the poor ratepayers should bear a fair proportion of the poor rate. Coventry Herald, 1 October, 8 October 1830.

(1) P.R.O.: M.H. 12/13377, Gulson to George Nicholls, 24 September 1834. On four days a week men were given 8oz of meat, 1 lb of bread, 3 pints of milk porridge, 1 pint of beer and 1 lb of vegetables; on three days they were given 1½ lbs of bread, 1½ pints of milk porridge, 1½ pints of pea soup, 2oz of cheese, and 1 pint of beer. Women were given three quarters of these amounts and children under nine years a half. Gulson would have liked the dietary to have been less lavish. The per capita cost of food in the workhouse in 1833 may be compared with the figure John Carter gave in 1817 - 4s.6d. But the earlier figure was, apparently, the per capita cost of all workhouse provision, and food prices were much higher in 1817: Mitchell and Deane, Abstract of British Historical Statistics (Cambridge, 1962), pp. 487 et seq.
(2) But not older, single able-bodied men.
(3) The corn-mill was substituted for the roadwork (which was gradually ended between 1830 and 1834) apparently because it was more easily supervised: P.R.O.: M.H. 12/13377, marginal note by Gulson on printed report of the directors for 1833.
(4) P.P.: H.C. 138 (1837-38) xviii, Part I, pp. 17 et seq; H.C. 145 (1837-38) xviii, Part I, p. 22; H.C. 44 (1834) xxix, Appendix A, p. 23a. Coventry Herald, 2 December 1831, 22 March 1833.
(5) P.R.O.: M.H. 12/13377, MS note on printed Statement of the Casual Outpoor, 10 March 1830; printed preface to Statement of the Outpoor, 27 February 1833.

for example, to all who kept dogs.(1) New scales for outdoor relief were drawn up. Payments for unemployed single able-bodied paupers did not now exceed 2s. On the other hand payments in supplementation of wages were still made to men with children (though to far fewer such men) and seem not to have become any more ungenerous on average than before, and the scales themselves were higher than those currently allowed by the Warwickshire justices. But in fact payments still varied rather capriciously. In 1833 Peter Parker, a weaver earning 10s.6d. a week, received 5s. relief because he had seven children. Joseph Ballard, a baker, earned 6s. and was paid 4s. for seven children. Edward White, an unemployed dyer with six children whose wife earned 4s., was paid 5s. in relief. James Pollard, an unemployed weaver with a wife and five children and no earnings, was paid 2s.6d. only, though this was an exceptionally low amount. The continued power of the directors to vary the scales individually seems to have been responsible for the fluctuations.(2) The economy policy produced vast savings. In the year that ended at Easter 1830, £9278 were spent on relief to the casual poor. In the following year this was cut to £4087 though the poor rates remained high to pay off the deficit, which was reduced to £242 by January 1831.(3) 1829-1830 was a year of disastrous slump in the ribbon trade and after a slight improvement the following year 1831 and 1832 saw a recurrence of very bad times; yet the cost of relieving the casual poor fell in 1831-1832 and 1832-1833 to £3948 and £3354 respectively.(4) In January 1830 there were 1395 casual outpoor families whose relief cost £282. Two years later the number of families had been cut to 733 and their cost to £103. Yet the slump in the ribbon trade was just as bad, and the numbers in the house had dropped by a much smaller amount.

The policy which Edward Gulson had helped to initiate was continued after his retirement from the directors at Easter 1832,

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(1) Coventry Herald, 2 September 1831.

(2) P.R.O.: M.H. 12/13377, Statement of the Outpoor, 27 February 1833, pp. 3 et seq. P.P.: H.C. 44 (1834) xxix, Appendix A, p. 23a.

(3) C.R.O., Proceedings of the Guardians of the Poor, p. 162.

(4) These figures are taken from a marginal note by Gulson on the printed accounts of the directors for 1833, in P.R.O. M.H. 12/13377. Comparable figures for other years are not recorded. Confusingly, they do not refer to the calendar years used by the directors as the basis for their published reports.

largely owing to the influence of Abel Rotherham, the Smithford Street draper, who served as director from 1832 to 1834.(1) But Gulson complained that despite the reformers' efforts the poor law economies in Coventry were inadequate; the workhouse test was insufficiently stringent, and relief continued to be paid in supplementation of the earnings of the able-bodied poor.(2) Nevertheless, the shift in policy was great: and what is striking is that the paupers of Coventry (as distinct from the ratepayers, whether paying or 'craving') neither acted much for themselves nor had any other group acting much for them. The ratepayers' interest was much stronger: though Gulson reported that some shopkeepers feared that the more rigorous policy would lead to a loss of their takings; the high poor rates, though paid out of their pockets, came back to them.(3) There was only one strong paupers' protest. In November 1831, just a few weeks after the Beck mill-burning, there was a riot at the workhouse. Young able-bodied paupers, denied outdoor relief and forced into the workhouse, were refused leave to go into the town. They took it anyway and returned drunk late in the evening. Governor Carter ordered their arrest; the watchmen had to retreat. All the city watch were called out - fifteen men in all. But led by Joseph Beck the paupers locked the door and when it was forced fought with pokers and iron rails taken from their beds, shouting 'Death or glory', 'One and all', and 'Conquer or die'. At length they were overcome and eleven were taken to the watchhouse. The magistrates sent one man to prison for twenty-one days for going absent without leave, eight for two months for assault, and two to quarter-sessions for severer punishment.(4) This ended protest. Unlike the Beck mill-burning, it was not even temporarily effective.

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(1) Coventry Herald, 11 April, 31 October 1834. Coventry Standard, 8 March 1844. P.P.: H.C. 140 (1837-38) xviii, Part I, p. 26. C.R.O.: Proceedings of the Guardians, p. 165. Abel Rotherham was the brother of R.K. Rotherham, the Tory corporator.

(2) P.P.: H.C. 138 (1837-38) xviii, Part I, p. 17. P.R.O.: M.H. 12/13377, Gulson to Nicholls, 24 September 1834. In October 1834 Gulson was one of the first four assistant commissioners to be appointed by the Poor Law Commission: Thomas Mackay, A History of the English Poor Law, iii, (London, 1898, repr. 1967), p. 174. See Appendix for Gulson's later career.

(3) P.P.: H.C. 138 (1837-38) xviii, Part I, p. 17. Gulson also complained of abuse and of his being threatened with a knife.

(4) Coventry Herald, 2 December 1831.

The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 left the powers of the Poor Law Commissioners undefined over areas subject to local acts, like Coventry. For ten years Coventry was not subject to the close control of the commissioners, though it received advice and pressure. There was much change in policy in the direction desired by the commissioners - but not enough to satisfy them. On the other hand, not all the changes the commission proposed were to the disadvantage of the poor - though most were: and, in addition, there was some change of local not central origin, and this was entirely to the paupers' disadvantage - though the commission, not the directors, got the blame. Thus in August 1837 the dietary of paupers in the workhouse was reduced, the amounts of bread, meat and beer given being cut to three quarters of the previous figures.(1) The directors' defence was that if they had not reduced the dietary themselves the Poor Law Commissioners would have forced them to do so, but in fact Chadwick's letters to them never mention the dietary.(2) The new dietary was in some respects inferior to that of the Foleshill union workhouse. Early in 1838 epidemics of measles and cholera in the workhouse led to many deaths among children and the aged; 63 out of 228 inmates died. Richard Earle, the assistant poor law commissioner who investigated, absolved the dietary from blame, and praised the humane efforts of the directors and the parish surgeons to tend the sick. But he found the workhouse far too cold and the clothing of the inmates inadequate. They were allowed to wear their own and were not put into paupers' uniform - but as a result they lacked the cloaks or greatcoats that union houses would have provided for the winter. He also regretted that the house was largely unclassified. (3) A few weeks later the guardians sanctioned the expenditure of £1000 to provide better heating and more classification, as Earle had recommended, and these changes were carried out, but his advice that better clothing be provided was apparently not followed.(4)

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(1) The cost per head per week of food in the workhouse in 1835 was 2s.3d; by 1838 this had risen to 2s.11d - a much smaller rise than that of food prices in the same period. The effect of reducing the dietary was to keep costs fairly stable.

(2) The directors' explanation was accepted by the radicals of the city; see Chapter Seven, Section II.

(3) P.R.O.: M.H. 12/13377, Richard Earle to Edwin Chadwick, 16 February 1838. Coventry Herald, 2 February 1838.

(4) Coventry Herald, 20 April 1838. Coventry Standard, 1 April 1842. C.R.O.: Proceedings of the Guardians of the Poor, pp. 200 et seq.

At a meeting in March 1842 the guardians congratulated each other on the classifying that had taken place; the sexes had been separated, and the dissolute from the moral. Previously, said Charles Bray,

> being all together, every species of moral depravity was carried on; now it was not so ... they were so classed that it tended not only to improve their morals, but to strengthen them in health, so that when they came out of the house they could get their living much better than when they went in ... He was sure the ratepayers would save in the end.(1)

But this did not satisfy the Poor Law Commission. Although the separation 'extended to married couples, and children not so young as to require the attention of their mothers ... the number and arrangement of the yards is by no means such as to insure a complete separation of males from females, either by day or night'.(2) Discipline was loose; inmates were frequently allowed to come and go as they pleased and were permitted visitors. They were set to work at silk-throwing but not all the time. 'They are half the time idle, smoking their pipes.'(3) The inmates at the throwing mill were paid small gratuities which made the house even less of a deterrent.(4)

The poor law inspectors were also critical of the policy of outdoor relief adopted. Soon after becoming Secretary to the Commissioners Chadwick had written to the Coventry directors recommending them to relieve the able-bodied in the house if possible, and if not to give relief in kind, not money, since it prevented waste and 'stops the relief of those who are not really necessitous'. Chadwick also assumed of course a labour test of need for relief.(5) The house was not big enough to accommodate all the casual poor who at times required relief, and the great majority of able-bodied men were relieved outdoors(6), not in: in return for labour at the corn-mill. In disregard of Chadwick's advice, their relief was in the

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(1) Coventry Standard, 1 April 1842.

(2) P.P.: [468] H.C. (1843) xxi, p. 158.

(3) ibid., p. 159.

(4) loc. cit. The inspectors wished the silk throwing to be discontinued (ibid., p. 160) and apparently it was soon after their visit.

(5) P.R.O.: M.H. 12/13377, Edwin Chadwick to the Directors of the Poor, 25 October 1834.

(6) 68 out of 88 able-bodied men being relieved in December 1842 were outdoor paupers.

1830s given in money, not kind. Apparently as a result of pressure from the assistant inspector, Robert Weale, the directors in 1840 altered the system of outdoor relief; to accord with the Poor Law Commission's policy half the relief was henceforth to be given in bread. This seemed to satisfy the inspectors on the point, and they made no criticism of the directors' failure to take all the able-bodied into the house for relief. The inspectors also favoured the rigour of the new scales of outdoor relief agreed to by the directors in September 1840. The scale set maxima for the relief of the unemployed, of 2s. for an adult and 1s.6d. for a child, that seem to be identical with those granted seven years earlier. For those in employment earnings limits were set beyond which relief in supplementation was not to be granted: for single persons the limit was set at 3s., an amount which as previously would exclude from relief all save the very occasionally employed: for those with children the earnings limit set varied according to the number, up to a maximum of 12s., however large the family. Under the scale, amounts granted in supplementation were not to bring the total family income above the earnings limit in question. This would sharply reduce the most generous amounts of supplementation granted in 1833.(1) In addition, the directors emphasised their determination never to exceed the maxima and pay less if possible. But the inspectors seemed to disapprove of a scale which allowed the directors even to consider supplementation of the normal weekly earnings of the lowest class of engine-loom weaver, if he had a large number of children, and reprobated very strongly the continued freedom exercised under the local act by individual directors to grant to individual claimants relief in excess of the agreed scale and thus to vitiate the board's collective rigour. The removal of this personal power and the enforcement of collective authority, as in normal poor law unions, was a major need in Coventry, thought the inspectors. They concluded that the cost of poor relief in Coventry 'although a smaller average than exists in some agricultural Unions ... probably exceeds that of any manufacturing town in the North of England'.(2)

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(1) For example, the case of Peter Parker, quoted above.

(2) P.P.: [468] H.C. (1843) xxi, pp. 152 et seq. See also P.R.O.: M.H. 12/13377, Report of Robert Weale, 20 November 1840. The extent to which wage supplements were still paid in the early 1840s was not indicated by the inspectors. The only evidence on the matter is in P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 307 - which mentions the 'gradual abandonment of payments in aid of wages' in the 1830s. Weale disapproved also of the high payments to the poor with settlements in Coventry but living elsewhere - for whom the united parishes were

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Between 1838 and 1842 the threat of the assimilation of the city's poor law system into the national pattern grew steadily greater, as it did for all thirty-two areas under local acts; they exhibited, according to the Poor Law Commission, the same tendency to pay wage supplements to able-bodied men in employment; this the commissioners wished to eradicate. They came to believe in the early 1840s that the 1834 act did in fact confer on them the power to enforce policy on local act areas, won several legal cases on the point, and by 1842 issued regulations to check abuses in several areas, though not in Coventry.(1) The city's turn would come: 'the legal presumption is, that the general law prevails everywhere: and this presumption can only be repelled by the existence of a provision in a special act clearly derogating from the general law with respect to the district'.(2)

Almost all opinion in Coventry was either satisfied with the city's poor law administration or regarded it as at least better than it would be if subject to the close control of the commissioners. Only the cantankerous and much disliked Abel Rotherham - 'honest Abel' - went on record urging that the guardians should ask the Poor Law Commission to place the city under the Poor Law Amendment Act and make it a normal union, to cut down the lavish expenditure still alleged to exist.(3) From the first the Coventry Herald took the line that the 1834 act was necessary to correct the prodigal poor law expenditure in many parts of England and to encourage thrift and

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(2) cont.
responsible; these payments had been £1262 in the year that ended in April 1833; nine years later they had been reduced to £663, but Weale regarded this as still too high. One change won the approval of Weale - the almost complete extinction of outdoor relief for bastards in Coventry after 1834: P.P.: [468] H.C. (1843) xxi, pp. 156 et seq.

(1) P.P.: [389] H.C. (1842) xix: Eighth Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners, pp. 18 et seq; [468] H.C. (1843) xxi, pp. 12 et seq.

(2) P.P.: [468] H.C. (1843) xxi, p. 24. Coventry's act contained no such provision.

(3) Coventry Herald, 8 April 1836. Coventry Standard, 1 April 1842. When Rotherham was a director in 1844 his action in writing abusive comments in the minute book led the board to take the unprecedented step of excusing the fines he would incur by failing to attend in future; when Rotherham still attended and the flow of insults continued the board 'viewing with disgust the conduct of Mr. Rotherham' agreed at a special meeting to institute fines of up to £10 for insults offered to directors by colleagues at their meetings. C.R.O.: Minutes of the Board of Directors for the United Parishes, i, 1 May, 8 May, 15 May, 5 June 1844.

industry among the poor. It was not, however, needed for Coventry, since the reforms of Gulson and his colleagues had made the city's poor law administration frugal. 'To us in Coventry, who see little if any of the abuses of the Poor Law, the evil is not generally understood to be of its actual magnitude.' The administration of the city's workhouse was 'not perfect ... but it is exceedingly excellent'.(1) The need to preserve outdoor relief for a city subject to periodic slumps when paupers could not all be accommodated in the workhouse was the reason for keeping local independence from the dictates of the Poor Law Commissioners.(2) At first the Tory Standard attacked the 1834 act with vehement but undiscriminating abuse, as an example of the way in which the Whigs sought 'to gag the people by Commissions and enactments, destructive of the principles of old English freedom'.(3) But when it discussed specific detail it admitted that it approved of the reduction in cost, the uniformity of rule and action, and the businesslike system, brought by the New Poor Law - qualities which the poor law administration of Coventry shared; there was no danger of the directors of the poor indulging in 'too profuse and indiscriminate liberality'.(4) But the Standard objected to the Poor Law Commission's hostility to outdoor relief, which might be proscribed if their control was extended fully over the city. Outdoor relief, though not needed everywhere, certainly was in Coventry because of its periodic slumps; forcing unemployed weavers into the workhouse for relief would (even if the house could take them all, which it could not) entail their selling their looms and thus, when the slump ended, either new looms would have to be bought for them from poor law funds or the weavers would become permanent paupers. Outdoor relief was in the interests of the ratepayers.

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(1) Coventry Herald, 4 April 1834. See also the leader of 15 April 1836.

(2) ibid., 12 February 1841, 20 May, 10 June 1842.

(3) Coventry Standard, 21 April 1837. See also the leaders of 12 August, 2 September 1836.

(4) Coventry Standard, 1 October 1841.

> 'If the Directors of the Poor ... were now under the direct control of the Commissioners, and ordered by them to withhold all outdoor relief to persons able to work, could they act upon such an order? and if they did, would not the result be oppressive to all parties?'(1) 'This city has hitherto been exempt from the interference of the Commissioners, and there are many reasons arising from the peculiar nature of its staple trade, which would render the application of strict regulations respecting outdoor relief peculiarly stringent and severe.'(2)

The near-unanimity of opinion in the city on the need to preserve local autonomy was shown in 1842. In that year the renewal for five years of the Poor Law Commission (then due to expire) was proposed in a bill. This was the city's last chance to keep Chadwick away. It united in an attempt to gain an amendment to the bill giving Coventry exemption from the authority of the commission. 300 or 400 guardians - far more than ever turned up at Easter to elect the directors(3) - attended a meeting in County Hall. Warden, the radical plumber(4), emphasised that the restriction of outdoor relief which he believed the commission would institute would be inhumane in Coventry, subject as it was to periodic slumps. In addition, it would be costly. Withholding the little outdoor relief that could tide the unemployed weaver over hard times

> would fix a man in the workhouse for life; they would so break that spirit of independence, that a man would be quite reckless of what became of himself and family ... They ought to consider the pockets of the ratepayers.(5)

The guardians agreed with him. A few days later the ratepayers held their meeting on Greyfriars Green. Edward Goode, the radical weaver, and William Browett, the Quaker draper of Smithford Street, argued that local self-government should be defended against centralisation; the directors and guardians were talented enough not to need Chadwick's orders. Charles Woodcock, the reactionary Tory solicitor, wished to protect the ratepayer from the idle pauper, but he thought the 'faultless poor' - the sick, the aged,

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(1) ibid., 8 January 1841.

(2) ibid., 5 March 1841. On this question, see also the leading articles in ibid., 23 February 1838, 8 October 1841, 10 June 1842.

(3) 25 attended the election of St. Michael's directors in March 1842. This was the usual number. C.R.O.: Proceedings of the Guardians, passim, and p. 212.

(4) For the only recorded radical criticism of the directors of the poor, in 1838, see Chapter Seven, section II.

(5) Coventry Standard, 10 June 1842.

and the unemployed - should be helped with outdoor relief. He agreed with Warden that to end it would be both cruel and expensive: in, Woodcock argued, social as well as financial terms. The New Poor Law was

> a restriction of the rights of the poor. He wished his own rights and privileges to be respected, and consequently he respected the rights and privileges of others. The poor possessed certain interests in the soil and property of this country which ought to be respected; otherwise how could he expect them to have a respect for his interests if he had no regard for theirs.(1)

David Buckney, the Chartist, argued for different reasons for the same end - the continuance of local autonomy. The local act was 'too aristocratical'; it gave power to a much more restricted group than the body of ratepayers who elected guardians in areas subject to the 1834 act. 'Yet it was a great deal better than the New Poor Law': since it permitted a more liberal policy than the commissioners in respect of outdoor relief and workhouse classification.(2) John Starkey, another Chartist(3), wished to break this civic concord with a wider political debate. The chairman would not allow him to speak; he and his Chartist associates talked for half an hour after the meeting closed - abusing the directors of the poor, the opponents of Chartism, and class legislation. But even they voted for the petition for Coventry's exemption from the control of the Poor Law Commission: this was moved by Charles Woodcock and William Taunton, to show the unity of all parties on the question, and was carried unanimously.(4)

The petition was presented, with no effect; the bill (which received the royal assent on 30 July) did not exempt Coventry from the control of the commissioners.(5) Within eighteen months the

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(1) loc. cit.
(2) loc. cit.
(3) Then in dispute with Buckney over the whole question of the alliance of Chartists with middle-class reformers, and over the repeal of the Corn Laws.
(4) Coventry Standard and Coventry Herald, 10 June 1842.
(5) Journals of the House of Commons, xcvii (1842), pp. 352, 547. 5 & 6 Vict. cap. 57: An Act to continue the Poor Law Commission ... Neither of the city's M.P.s spoke in the debates. Ellice voted for the bill on second reading and did not vote at all thereafter. Williams voted against it at every stage to the end, supporting the unsuccessful wrecking amendments and motions for the adjournment proposed by Sharman Crawford, Busfield Ferrand and T.S. Duncombe. Apart from hostility to the commission, much of the opposition to the bill came from dislike of section 6, and related sections, giving the commission power to dissolve Gilbert Unions: to expedite its passage these controversial sections were dropped by Graham. But they would not in any case have added to the commission's powers over areas under local acts. Parliamentary Debates, third series, lxiv (1842), pp. 94 et seq, 233 et seq, 551 et seq, 643 et seq; lxv (1842), pp. 74 et seq, 323 et seq, 496 et seq.

united parishes had been brought as firmly under the control of the Poor Law Commission as any ordinary union. Coventry's peculiar nomenclature - guardians and directors - remained, also the narrow constituency of the former and the method of election and length of service of the latter. But it was made clear to them by Chadwick that the policy they had to apply, and the rules they had to abide by, were those laid down by the Poor Law Commissioners; in January and February 1844 the Commission's General Orders for Union Officers and Workhouse Rules were issued to the Coventry directors, the only change from the common form being one of terminology - 'director' being substituted for 'guardian'.(1) The assistant poor law inspectors' old complaint against the local administration - that under the local act directors had assumed the power to disregard collective decisions - was thus remedied; the strengthening of Chadwick's hand over local act areas on this point by the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1844(2) was unnecessary in Coventry's case. To make the new position entirely clear in the city, 200 copies of the commission's General Orders were issued to the directors for circulation in May 1844.(3) In any case of doubt thereafter it was stressed by Chadwick and his successors that the General Orders of the commission (and after 1847 the Poor Law Board) applied as much in Coventry as elsewhere.(4)

The rules sent to Coventry by the commission early in 1844 laid down, in effect, that the discipline and classification of the work-house should become much more rigorous than they had been when they excited Weale's disapproval in the early 1840s. The changes involved were effected by the directors in the next few years: paupers could no longer come and go as they pleased; the sexes were strictly separated as were the aged and impotent from the able-bodied, and the disorderly from the orderly. The new classification was in some ways a gain for the inmates; as David Buckney and Charles Woodcock (no friends to the New Poor Law) pointed out, it meant that prostitutes suffering from venereal disease were now separated from respectable able-bodied women. Still, on balance the new regime

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(1) P.R.O.: M.H. 12/13377, General Orders etc. for Coventry, January - February 1844. P.P.: [560] H.C. (1844) xix: Tenth Annual Report of the Poor Law Commission, p. 15.

(2) 7 & 8 Vict., cap. 101. Clause 64 compelled Guardians under a local act to act as a board, and not individually.

(3) C.R.O.: Minutes of the Directors of the Poor, i, p. 11.

(4) For an example, see P.R.O.: M.H. 12/13378, Edwin Chadwick to Thomas Hine (directors' clerk) 28 April 1846, over the apprenticeship regulations for pauper children.

in the workhouse was harsher and less pleasant for paupers(1): such, indeed, was the judgement in the city.(2)

For those who had previously received outdoor relief it was certainly harder. The central authority did not insist that it should cease entirely: it accepted the submission of the directors that no more than 320 could in safety be accommodated in the house of industry without extensive additions, and since it did not suggest them, it perforce accepted that many paupers, particularly in times of slump, had to be relieved outside the house.(3) On the other hand, the provision of such relief was made noticeably more stringent and niggardly than before 1844. The effect of the new rigour may be seen in the figures for outdoor relief before and after that date. There was a great reduction in the number of outpoor families and in the cost of their maintenance. In July 1843 (when the slump that the ribbon trade had suffered in 1842 was over) 453 outpoor families were being relieved. One year later this number had been cut to 345 and by July 1845 to 307. This reduction was explicitly attributed at the time to a more rigorous policy of relief; that it was the result of better times was denied.(4) The effect of the new policy is most noticeable when the outpoor figures for January 1841 and January 1847 - both slump years that called forth private relief funds in Coventry - are compared. In January 1841 there were 318 permanent (aged and impotent) and 266 casual (able-bodied) outpoor families. Six years later the total was 281.(5) A reduction of this magnitude implies

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(1) P.R.O.: M.H. 12/13379, John Graves to Poor Law Board, 8 July 1847, 5 April 1848. C.R.O.: Minutes of the Directors of the Poor, i, 19 June 1844; Proceedings of the Guardians of the Poor, 4 March 1844. Coventry Standard, 8 March 1844. On the other hand, the ending by the poor law inspector of the old habit in Coventry of putting two able-bodied men in one bed in times of pressure - he insisted, apparently, that new beds be bought - shows how the new regular discipline of the house could in some ways help to preserve the dignity of the poor. P.R.O.: M.H. 12/13380, Robert Weale to PLB, 14 August 1855.

(2) See the complaints at the new hardship in Coventry Herald, 13 December 1844. Coventry Standard, 14 October 1859.

(3) P.R.O.: M.H. 12/13378, Directors of the Poor to Poor Law Commission, 12 June 1844. C.R.O.: Minutes of the Directors of the Poor, 5 June, 12 June 1844. The commission and board generally accepted the need for much outdoor relief for able-bodied paupers in industrial areas in the 1840s and after. See M.E. Rose, 'The New Poor Law in an Industrial Area', in R.M. Hartwell, ed., The Industrial Revolution (Oxford, 1970), pp. 130 et seq.

(4) Coventry Herald, 19 January 1844.

(5) The poor law accounts in C.R.O.: Proceedings of the Guardians, do not distinguish between permanent and casual outpoor after January 1844.

that both categories of outpoor suffered.(1) And the abandonment of the last vestiges of wage-supplementation for the able-bodied that remained when Weale reported in the early 1840s is indicated by the almost uniformly encomiastic reports of the poor law auditors and the inspectors after 1844.(2) And what pleased the poor law authority displeased the city.(3)

Those in the city who protested at the rigour of the new policy of outdoor relief were unsure whether to criticise the directors or the poor law board. Thus in 1855 R.K. Rotherham and William Wilmot argued strongly that the directors should be giving outdoor relief far more liberally: but their criticism was moderated by the mayor, who pointed out that they were bound by strict regulations as to outdoor relief, which they could not legally exceed.(4)

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(1) It seems certain, too, that the greater part of the reduction is to be accounted for by a more rigorous policy towards the poor in Coventry (both those with settlements and those without) rather than by the decrease in relief payments to those paupers with Coventry settlements who were resident elsewhere. This decrease did indeed take place, though by what amount is unknown. (Coventry Herald, ., loc.cit.) But even if such payments were entirely eliminated they cannot account for the total reduction that occurred: in 1842 (the last year for which details of these payments are available) they amounted to only £663; outdoor relief cost c. £4,850 in the same year.

(2) Like normal poor law unions, the united parishes were after 1844 subject to regular inspection and semi-annual audit by officers of the commission and board. Their reports (and the documentation produced by the appointment of all union officers, for which the approval of the central authority was needed) form the great bulk of the material in P.R.O.: M.H. 12/13378, 13379, 13380 and 13381 for the period to 1861. Accounts and administration were almost always found entirely correct and approved. Occasional faults were usually procedural and due to venial ignorance or misunderstandings which were quickly remedied on official advice. A notable exception was the clerk's gross failure to keep the general ledger accounts in 1855, which was followed by his prompt resignation. P.R.O.: M.H. 12/13380, J. Hunt to PLB, 15 October, 1 December 1855. The able-bodied had been relieved outdoors only in return for labour at the corn mill in the early 1840s, before the commission took close control. The Poor Law Board approved of the rigour of this labour test, and also of its being supplemented by a stone yard during the slump of 1857, when there were too many outpoor men to work at the mill. P.R.O.: M.H. 12/13380, Herbert Dewes to PLB, 30 November 1853, PLB to Thomas Hine, 7 December 1853; M.H. 12/13381, W. Harris to PLB, 20 May 1858, Robert Weale to PLB, 24 July 1858.

(3) See the reports of meetings to raise private funds for the unemployed, at which criticisms of the inadequacy of outdoor relief was voiced: Coventry Standard, 17 December 1847, 23 February 1855; also the leading articles asking for more generous outdoor relief in ibid., 2 August 1844, 18 December 1846, 28 May 1847.

(4) Coventry Standard, 23 February 1855.

Nevertheless, the impression is strong that the directors willingly accepted their role as economisers - although in 1844 they had expressed a desire to remain free from the control of the commission.(1) Between 1844 and 1860 they seem to have complained only once against the regulations of the authority: in October 1852, when they argued that the Out-Relief Order of 25 August, which instructed that half such relief paid to paupers over 60 should be in kind. The directors asked for discretionary power to deviate from the order since it worked harshly towards the aged.(2) Indeed, the evidence suggests that the directors freely accepted and acquiesced in the harshness of the system they administered. When great unemployment once again occurred in the ribbon trade, in 1860 and 1861, the weavers learned that directors showed vastly less sympathy for them than had their predecessors of thirty years before.

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(1) In April 1844 H. Browett met deputations from Bristol, Hull, Plymouth, Southampton, Birmingham and Brighton in an abortive attempt to persuade Sir James Graham to insert in 7 & 8 Vict., c.101, a clause exempting them - places under local acts - from the control of the Poor Law Commission. C.R.O.: Minutes of the Directors of the Poor, i, pp. 9 et seq.

(2) P.R.O.: M.H. 12/13380, Thomas Hine to PLB, 28 October 1852. C.R.O.: Minutes of the Directors of the Poor, iii, 27 October 1852. The request was refused, but owing to widespread national protest the order was later withdrawn. P.R.O.: loc.cit. PLB to Hine, 2 November 1852; M.E. Rose, op, cit., pp. 134 et seq.

II

Charitable relief

Statutory poor relief was not the only means of assisting the distressed that was adopted in Coventry. For some, charity was a valuable supplement. For electors who wished to preserve their franchise, it was a necessary alternative, at all events after 1832. From 1722 onwards, the law was that acceptance of parochial relief disfranchised Coventry electors; in practice, the disqualification became much more stringent after the Great Reform Act than before it.(1) But the acceptance of doles from formal or informal charities did not disqualify electors: nor, significantly, do the poor seem to have felt that these brought the moral stigma of parochial relief.(2)

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(1) The Commons determined in November 1722 that the right of voting in Coventry inhered in duly qualified freemen who did not receive 'alms or weekly charity'. This provision was repeated in the preamble to the act of 1772 compelling the corporation to admit men duly qualified, 21 Geo. III, cap. 54. This restriction on Coventry's electorate appears to have been exceptional; see E. and A.G. Porritt, The Unreformed House of Commons (Cambridge 1903, 2 vols), i, p. 69. In practice, it seems that only freemen resident in almshouses or the house of industry at elections were disqualified. See P.P.: H.C. 148 (1826-27), iv, p. 261. At the 1826 election only 68 paupers and 6 almsmen were disqualified. The Great Reform Act denied a place in the electoral register of any borough (compiled every autumn) to any person who had received parochial relief in the year ending the previous 31 July. This disqualification would operate till the next register was compiled. It applied of course to both freemen and £10 householders. 2 and 3 William IV, cap. 45, clause 36.

(2) In the great slump at the end of 1860 recently prosperous first-hands disliked accepting assistance from any source - selling their furniture before they did - but hated the idea of parochial relief most of all. See P.R.O.: M.H. 12/13382, John Jenkins, Notes on the Distress in Coventry, 14 December 1860, and the speech of A.H. Pears reported in Coventry Standard, 14 December 1860. See also Chapter Eleven, Section II. Joseph Gutteridge was too proud to apply for parochial relief on this occasion, but he had previously asked for the £4 gift. Lights and Shadows, pp. 71, 151.

In quantity, the formal charities of the city were the most valuable supplements or alternatives to poor relief.(1) The total disbursed by them each year in the early 1850s was well over £2000 in financial doles alone; several hundreds more were spent on gifts in kind.(2) Thus the amount of cash disbursed by formal charities exceeded the cost of the outpoor to the poor rate in all years - whether prosperous or not - from 1846 onwards, even though the outpoor cost included also the amount spent on Coventrians with a settlement in their native city who were being relieved elsewhere. In very prosperous years, like those of the early 1850s, it also equalled or even exceeded the total amount spent by the poor law administration on both inpoor and outpoor: though in the very bad years round 1830 it equalled only a fraction of the burden borne by the poor rate.(3) Thus the relative value of the city's charities in alleviating poverty rose as the city became more prosperous and the administration of the poor law more rigorous: the Charity Commission's scheme of 1856, therefore, was advanced precisely at a time when to Coventrians the dole charities it proposed to commandeer seemed more significant than ever. This helps to explain the hostility it aroused.(4)

But as a means of alleviating the episodic distress common in the ribbon trade the formal charities had defects. They were distributed at fixed times in the year, which might or might not correspond with the slumps that occurred; it was of little use to a weaver's family starving in April to know that it might receive £4 in June;(5) in addition, though the same family might be distressed several times in a ten-year period, it could receive the gift only once during it. So it was customary during times of slump to raise in the city special private distress funds applicable to current

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(1) The largest dole, the White £4 gift, was an alternative only. Those who had received parochial relief in the previous year were ineligible for it. P.P.: [2060] H.C. (1856) xxii, p. 107.

(2) See Chapter Eight, Section II.

(3) See the tables in the Appendix for poor law figures.

(4) See also Charity Commission Records: Registered File 216235/3, General Municipal Charities, Coventry, memorial of the Directors of the Poor against the Charity Commission's scheme, January 1856.

(5) The month in which the White gift was distributed. See entries in C.R.O.: Council Minutes, passim.

poverty - funds which like the formal charities did not affect the franchise. In the distress of 1817 £3,300 was raised for such a fund. Similar funds followed in the 1820s though the totals raised are not made clear.(1) After 1830 relief funds were customary too, at all great depressions. In the slump at the beginning of 1837 Walter Farquhar Hook, the Tory vicar of Holy Trinity initiated a public meeting in the County Hall at which the mayor took the chair. The Anglican clergyman Thomas Sheepshanks and the dissenting ministers Sibree and Jerard, the Tories George Eld, William Wilmot and E.H. Woodcock, and the radicals Edward Goode and Charles Bray - men, that is, usually not co-operating with each other in anything - made united appeals for money for bread and coals. An all-party committee was elected. In six weeks £861 had been subscribed and £783 of it spent on 30,171 4 lb loaves distributed in the city. As the slump continued, another relief fund was raised by the same committee in April, though its amount is not known. A meeting of weavers in April thanked their wealthier neighbours for their generosity.(2)

The slump of 1841 led to another requisition to the Mayor for a public meeting to raise a relief fund. Again leading citizens of all views - the Conservative and Anglican ribbon manufacturer Cleophas Ratliff and the dissenting radical Edward Goode, for example - appealed for funds. 'It added in no small degree to the beauty of the landscape', said the Rev. Francis Franklin of Cow Lane Baptist Chapel, 'and formed a bond of union between the parties, when those who were in affluent circumstances felt disposed to assist those who stood in need of it'.(3) £160 was subscribed at the meeting. One week later 10,000 were receiving relief twice a week. £917 were collected by the middle of March, of which nearly £800 were spent on almost 30,000 4lb loaves.(4) A slight improvement during the summer months had disappeared by winter. 'A Townsman' wrote of the distress in Coventry, 'patiently borne': 'the bed sold - the coat pawned - the comfortable home changed for the narrow confines of an unhealthy room; the great number of houses untenanted attests the fact'. A fresh public subscription was needed.(5) Another requisition was sent to the mayor, another

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(1) See Chapter Two, Sections I and V.
(2) Coventry Herald, 6 January, 13 January, 20 January, 14 April, 21 April 1837. Coventry Standard, 10 February, 24 February, 21 April 1837.
(3) Coventry Standard, 29 January 1841.
(4) ibid., 29 January, 5 February, 19 March 1841.
(5) ibid., 26 November 1841.

meeting convened. On this occasion, however, the usual ceremonious and ostentatious suppression of party differences had scarcely been put in motion, by the Anglican clergymen W. Drake and John Howells, the Quaker silkman John Gulson, the Tory banker E.H. Woodcock and the liberals A.H. Pears and J.S. Whittem, when an unprecedented event occurred. Its effect on the civil establishment may be gauged by the outraged capitals employed by the Coventry Standard: 'the meeting had thus far proceeded unanimously, when there was an INTERRUPTION TO THE PROCEEDINGS OCCASIONED BY THE CHARTISTS'.(1) David Buckney and William Taunton pressed the motion 'that it was the opinion of this meeting that the distress was attributable to the partial and unjust laws arising from the system of class legislation and the absence of salutary regulations between employers and their workmen'.(2) The respectable citizens departed from the meeting in County Hall to organise another, free from controversy. At the meeting of the Chartist rump left behind in County Hall it was pointed out to Buckney and Taunton by the Rev. John Gordon, the Unitarian minister, that continued pressing of their motion was likely to lead to a withering of civic generosity. Very revealingly, Buckney and Taunton withdrew the motion.(3)

A fresh meeting was held a few days later, on the usual non-controversial principle. This time, Chartists were excluded. £100 were collected at the table, and as it happened the relief fund appears to have been more generously subscribed than any since 1817. £1352 were collected, much of it by committees in the ten ancient wards; money came too from the two M.P.s, Lords Craven and Hood, and the London silkmen, who gave £300, while the leading colliery proprietor of Warwickshire, George Whieldon, gave forty tons of coal. This, with 42,000 quartern loaves, was distributed to hungry weavers in January and February 1842. The balance of the fund, £64, was held over for the next crisis.(4) This came at the end of 1847. The usual meeting occurred. It was announced that the fund would be used to assist not those getting poor relief but independent working men who would rather suffer than be paupers. (5) But how grateful such men were for help, commented the Rev. J.B.

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(1) ibid., 31 December 1841.
(2) loc. cit.
(3) loc. cit. See also Chapter Seven, Section III for a further discussion of the Chartist involvement in the relief meeting of December 1841.
(4) Coventry Standard, 7 January, 25 February 1842.
(5) This appears to have been the first occasion on which the distress fund was explicitly reserved to non-paupers.

Collisson of St. Michael's, and how peaceful the poor of the city were - though they lived in the stinking courts of Dead Lane and Far Gosford Street. Once again, subscription committees were begun in the ten wards. £940 were raised, which with the balance of the 1842 fund provided eight distributions of bread - 33,000 quartern loaves - by May 1848.(1)

Once again a substantial amount was left unspent - £98, which stayed in the bank until the crisis of 1855 (after the prosperity of the early 1850s) made another fund necessary. The usual all-party meeting was called by requisition to the mayor, who took the chair in St. Mary's Hall. In the bitter frosts of February, when the ice on the canal was eighteen inches thick, 3,000 applied for relief on the first day. As before, bread was given only to those not enjoying poor relief. It was however as a result of the increased stringency and rigour of the administration of the poor law that for the first time a precise scale of relief under the charitable fund was drawn up. Charity itself was more carefully regulated than had been usual forty years before. Those whose earnings totalled less than 1s.6d. a week for each adult and 6d. for each child were given 3lbs of bread per day for each adult and 1lb for each child. Those whose earnings were greater, up to a maximum for eligibility of 3s. for each adult and 1s. for each child, were given proportionately less. 86,000 loaves were distributed, until the onset of better weather and the revival of trade in the middle of March made it possible to close charitable relief. £292 then remained unspent - £872 having been subscribed for this occasion and added to the £98 remaining from the previous fund.(2) The balance was carried forward to the next slump, at the end of 1857, when the mayor told the public meeting he convened in St. Mary's Hall that 'he never recalled so severe a time, both for masters and men'. Once more Anglicans and dissenters, Conservatives like Alderman Lynes and radicals like William Taunton appealed for a public subscription. This raised just over £600, to which the earlier balance was added. Bread was distributed until the end of January. £220 remained unspent.(3)

Despite the mayor's statement at the end of 1857, it seems clear that distress was much less extensive in time and nature than

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(1) Coventry Standard, 17 December 1847, 11 February, 5 May 1848.
(2) Coventry Standard, 23 February, 2 March, 9 March, 1 June 1855.
(3) Coventry Standard, 4 December, 11 December 1857, 7 May 1858. Coventry Herald, 18 December 1857, 15 January, 22 January 1858.

it had been forty years before. The fact that the public subscription raised in 1857 was less than one fifth of the total collected in 1817 may perhaps be attributed to the less dire situation at the later date - and to the preceding greater prosperity of the weavers, which made them more able to sustain it. But no such explanation may be adduced for the amount collected for the distress fund of the spring of 1860 - only £170,(1) which even with the £220 remaining from the previous fund was woefully inadequate to meet the weavers' needs: distress then approached, or equalled, the scale of 1817, and the amount subscribed was about one twentieth of the total on the earlier occasion. But the Cobden-Chevalier treaty of 1860 was a moral earthquake: it dislodged old loyalties, old attitudes, old compassions in the city. Inhabitants who had previously subscribed so generously to support unemployed weavers now argued that weavers had to be prepared to accept lower remuneration than the lists of prices stipulated: such a concession was necessary to meet foreign competition, and so preserve the future prosperity of the trade and city. And only when the weavers had been beaten into submission and had surrendered the list, was the city prepared to subscribe again for their relief in the bitter distress at the end of 1860.

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(1) See Chapter Eleven, Section II.

CHAPTER TEN

THE ATTITUDES OF THE PRESS 1824-1860

I

The Coventry Herald

The liberal newspaper of the city, the Coventry Herald, was founded in 1808 by Nathaniel Merridew, a Congregationalist and a ribbon warehouseman.(1) Sixteen years later the newspaper was owned by his son, Henry Merridew, dissenter and ribbon manufacturer.(2) He sold it to John Turner, probably a kinsman of John Turner, ribbon manufacturer, in October 1842. Four years later Charles Bray, the philosopher and ribbon manufacturer bought it; he ran it until 1874, when it was sold to John Moir Scott.(3)

Under Merridew and Turner, the Herald spoke for the dissenting interest - for the redress of their grievances against the Anglican Establishment. In the late 1820s it argued for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts (and also for Catholic Emancipation). In the 1830s and early 1840s one of the grievances it disliked most

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(1) Coventry Herald, 10 April, 11 April 1908 - articles on the history of the journal.

(2) ibid., 2 January 1824. All files of the Coventry Herald between 1808 and 1824 were destroyed in the Second World War.

(3) ibid., 11 January 1833, 7 October 1842, 17 July 1846. Francis White, History, Gazetteer, and Directory of Warwickshire (Sheffield, 1850), p. 547. Charles Bray, Phases of Opinion, pp. 81 et seq. In 1831 the Herald claimed a circulation of about 600. By 1859 it had risen to over 1,000. Coventry Herald, 3 June 1831. Newspaper Press Directory (London, 1860), p. 136.

strongly was church and vicar's votes. It wanted them abolished and, meanwhile, approved the refusal of some dissenters to pay them. Thus it denounced Pickering, the Nuneaton dissenter, for arguing in a pamphlet that his fellows ought willingly to pay them, and praised J.T. Bannister's counter-pamphlet advocating disobedience to immoral laws.(1) The failure, or inability, of the Whig governments after 1830 to abolish church rates disappointed the Herald. The exclusion of dissenters from the universities, and their disabilities in the matters of marriages, parochial burial grounds and the registration of births, marriages and deaths it disliked; it commended the alleviation of all these grievances (save the first) by the Whigs in 1836. Tithes it disliked too - but it denounced radical proposals that they should be abolished, since they were a species of property (quite different from church rates) whose summary removal would menace property rights everywhere; commutation, the formula adopted in 1836, it approved. In general it commended until the early 1840s the argument of the Whigs (and in particular its hero, Edward Ellice) that dissenters' grievances should be removed but the Establishment, though reformed, retained. It approved the reform of church revenues carried out by the Whigs in the 1830s, but argued in 1834, for example, that bishops should continue to sit in the House of Lords, since their rank enabled them to exercise, through that institution, a good influence on the people; the old evil of a Tory episcopate would be ended by the Whigs - who would appoint liberals. It thus refused to print, in the same year, a letter from J. Sibree calling for disestablishment; the Herald could espouse, it said, the opinions of no sect. But like many dissenters in Coventry and elsewhere, the Herald shifted its position on Establishment in the 1840s, owing to the fears aroused by the education clauses of Graham's factory bill in 1843. By 1845 it was opposing the Maynooth Grant on the grounds that it disliked all established churches. This was its attitude when Bray took over the paper.(2)

A similar distrust of extreme solutions was characteristic of its political attitudes. The Herald consistently favoured parliamentary reform from 1824 onwards.(3) It welcomed the success of

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(1) For this dispute, see Chapter Seven, Section IV.

(2) For this section, see Coventry Herald, 30 March 1827, 18 June 1830, 14 January 1831, 17 February, 12 October 1832, 18 January, 15 February, 19 November 1833, 3 January, 31 January, 7 February, 21 March, 28 March, 13 June, 27 June 1834, 3 April 1835, 19 February, 20 May, 15 July, 7 October, 2 December, 16 December 1836, 21 February 1840, 3 December 1841, 31 March 1843, 18 April, 16 May, 6 June, 3 October 1845.

(3) ibid., 7 January 1825, 25 August 1826, 4 June 1830.

reformers in the 1830 general election, and looked forward to an extension of the franchise and the representation of large towns so far without M.P.s. But it stressed its desire for gradual, not revolutionary reform, and thought for some months that the Wellington ministry might introduce it; though the Herald welcomed the French revolution of 1830 it said (in a sidelong glance at the Coventry Political Union) that Britain did not need anything like it.(1) By the end of 1830 the Herald thought that a British revolution - in which, horrifyingly, manufacturers might have been allied with the rick-burning agricultural labourers the journal feared so much - would have occurred if Wellington, unfortunately so hostile to parliamentary reform, had not fallen from power. The Herald now looked to Earl Grey to save the country from such a revolution by meeting its needs on the 'all-important' question of parliamentary reform.(2) These needs were indeed met, argued the Herald, by the Whig bill, calculated to give the middle class control over the House of Commons.

> And is there any class, we would ask, which is more moral or intelligent? Such an individual will be seen to preserve the good order of society and the power of the laws. Free from the temptations to err, which are found sometimes to be connected with extreme poverty, and not sheltered by the impunity from vice afforded by great wealth or elevated rank, a man in the middle class observes the decencies of life with greater exactness, and carries the domestic virtues into more perfect operation.(3)

The benefits expected from the parliaments to be dominated by the middle class were extensive. Food would become cheap and employment abundant; the reform bill was a necessary first step to helping the poor, even though it did not enfranchise them.(4)

> Two county men were talking, during the chairing at Warwick, and one said to the other 'What does this reform mean?' 'Why', replied his companion, 'I'm an older man than you, and can recollect when we had better flour for eighteen-pence a stone, than we have now for half-a-crown; and it is to bring down the price of flour as it used to be.' 'Well then', said the younger, 'if that's it, it's worth trying for.' 'Now that it is, and it is worth trying for.'(5)

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(1) ibid., 13 August, 20 August, 27 August, 3 September, 1 October, 5 November, 26 November 1830.
(2) ibid., 3 December, 24 December 1830, 7 January, 14 January 1831. See also ibid., 20 January 1832, for a later expression of the need to pass the bill to save the country from revolution.
(3) ibid., 11 March 1831. See also ibid., 20 May 1831: the integrity and honesty of the English householder was a guarantee that the reform bill would not lead to the spoliation of property.
(4) ibid., 15 April 1831.
(5) ibid., 13 May 1831. See also ibid., 2 March 1832, 'A Reformed House of Commons will assuredly enact laws to feed the hungry, and that will for ever remove the present causes of our distress'; and 8 June 1832, making the same point.

The Herald saw some minor defects in the bill as originally published or as amended; it regarded the provisions to divide the counties and extend the county franchise to tenants-at-will (by the Chandos clause) as likely to increase aristocratic influence, and it thought that the Coventry apprentices already indentured were badly treated by the original proposal that they should not be able to gain the freeman franchise. But on the main question which so greatly affected its locality the Herald agreed with the government plan - that the freeman franchise should eventually be abolished - and asked all who wished to fight to retain it what it would profit them to keep it if the price were to keep the borough-mongers in power?(1) The need to support the Whig government was paramount - and so the Herald praised the attitude of the great majority of Coventry freemen who were prepared to sacrifice their peculiar interests and back the bill, undertaken not to promote 'a mere theory of politics' but to change the representative system so as to 'relieve the people of the distress they suffer, and give them the permanent means of future prosperity'.(2) The nation faced two sets of enemies; the reactionaries who threatened to precipitate a revolution by opposing all significant reform, among whom was singled out 'the mushrooms, or rather the fungi of the Aristocracy, - such as Yankee lords and the sons of coal dealers, - who feel the low democracy of their birth, and who hate the order they left'(3) -

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(1) ibid., 4 March, 15 July, 19 August, 26 August 1831. The Herald welcomed the Municipal Corporations Bill of 1835 and its original provision that in future freemen should not be created, though it thought the proposal to deny the freedom to apprentices already bound was a little hard: the freemen were part of a corrupt and outmoded corporate system which should be entirely swept away. It looked forward to the eventual enjoyment by the entire city of the freemen's charities and to the transmutation of their Lammas right into a municipal fund which would make possible the abolition of the street rate. The Herald was intensely angered by the changes introduced into the bill by the House of Lords. ibid., 19 June, 26 June, 10 July, 24 July, 21 August, 4 September 1835. The Herald gave a lukewarm welcome to Williams's bill abolishing the stamp duty on admission to the freedom. ibid., 22 June 1838. It constantly called for the enclosure of the Lammas and Michaelmas lands, being willing in 1834 for 'a third and a quarter' to be paid but by 1844 being strongly in favour of Bray's bill and resentful of the inordinate demands of the freemen. ibid., 29 August 1834, 5 August 1836, 30 November, 1 December 1843, 14 June 1844, 26 September 1845. 'The paltry amount of benefit derived by a fractional part of the Freemen from these lands, is but dust in the balance when compared to the great barrier which they present to the extension of the Town as a commercial City.' ibid., 20 April 1838.

(2) ibid., 14 October 1831. See also ibid., 28 January 1831.

(3) ibid., 21 October 1831. See also ibid., 11 May 1832 on the need to resist peaceably the current attempts of Lord Lyndhurst to form a Tory government.

men whose adverse vote in the House of Lords, it was alleged, provoked the disgraceful Bristol riots in October 1831;(1) and on the other hand the radicals who demanded now a larger measure of reform than the Whigs were prepared to concede - men who demanded, that is, a degree and a pace of change that only a revolution could achieve, who menaced the cause of moderate reform by recklessness, and who excited insurrection by the wildness of their tongue - a set of 'pestilent fellows, whose whole career is calculated to excite the misguided partisan of "Swing" to acts of still greater outrage'.(2) This attack was occasioned by the speech calling for radical reform made by Henry Hunt in Coventry in January 1831 - a speech marked, said the Herald, by 'coarse abuse ... utter recklessness of all decent decorum ... ruffian blackguardism'.(3) The visit of Hetherington in July, in which he attacked the reform bill for not going far enough and called for manhood suffrage and the ballot, prompted the Herald to remark that 'there are individuals whose avowed object is revolution and robbery, and who long for an opportunity to shake off the controul of the laws' - men whose words pointed up the need to give 'the intelligence and property of the country the right of sending members to Parliament', so as to strengthen the forces of law and order and give the government the moral authority (so signally lacked by the borough-mongers) to suppress revolutionaries.(4) The passage of the reform bill was greeted by the Herald with the argument that political unions would no longer be needed - since the people could now freely express their opinions through the election of M.P.s; and when the CPU, instead of dissolving itself, went on to attempt to extract specific pledges from the liberal candidates for the city, Ellice and Bulwer, the journal commented that many of the new electors 'appear to be as pleased with their new privilege as a child with a new doll, and, in truth, to be nearly as despotic. They seem to think their members

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(1) ibid., 4 November 1831.

(2) ibid., 4 February 1831. See also ibid., 25 February 1831. The Herald's attack led to a resolution against its 'malignant and unjust aspersions' being carried at a meeting of the Society of the Friends of the People - a resolution denounced by the paper as a product of 'singular conceit and misconception'. Benjamin Poole supported the Herald, against some of his radical friends, and asked for sympathy for the gradualist approach of the Whig government and appreciation of the difficulties it faced. ibid., 18 February, 4 March 1831.

(3) ibid., 14 January 1831.

(4) ibid., 29 July, 5 August 1831.

are to be mere puppets.'(1)

The Herald did not agree with most of the demands of the political union radicals. The corn laws it had long been opposed to: they were indeed 'more injurious than any law or tax now in existence' but would not be repealed by the unreformed parliament: hence indeed the need for reform.(2) Thus after the passage of the bill the journal agreed with radicals in calling for the repeal of the corn laws; the Herald regarded it as the greatest necessity. All the other changes the Herald wanted - tithe commutation, church reform, municipal reform - were mere palliatives as compared with the removal of the cause of the nation's distress. And the Herald did not dislike the newspaper stamp duty, since it kept the ownership of journals in the hands of respectable men of property, and away from the control of demagogues without capital. Radical calls for the abolition of assessed taxes on carriages, houses and windows, and for the ballot and triennial parliaments it regarded as irrelevant. 'Of the necessity of a further Reform in Parliament we are not yet assured, and we hate all useless change.'(3)

By 1835 the Herald had become firmly convinced of the need for the ballot (owing it said to the corruption of the Coventry election of that year); the ballot joined corn law repeal as essential measures upon which it recommended sensible radicals to unite, instead of pursuing crank notions such as the abolition of the House of Lords, universal suffrage and annual parliaments - which at the very least would break the Whig-radical coalition and let the Tories in again.(4) Thus the resurgence of radical activity from 1837

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(1) Coventry Herald, 1 June, 3 August 1832. See also ibid., 31 August 1832 - an attack on William Cobbett for demanding the phased abolition of the National Debt at the Castle Inn.

(2) ibid., 26 August 1831. See also 19 November 1830.

(3) ibid., 11 January 1833. See also 25 January, 1 February, 8 February, 22 March, 29 March, 31 May, 21 June, 6 September, 1 November 1833. The Herald had welcomed the reduction of the newspaper and advertisement duties in 1831 and the consequent reduction of its price from 7d. to 6d., but opposed further reductions. ibid., 18 February, 2 December 1831. The Herald did welcome the reduction of the newspaper duty to 1d. in 1836, as providing greater opportunities to diffuse political truths, but also (apparently) as eliminating the price advantage which the unstamped press had previously enjoyed. ibid., 18 March, 6 May 1836. One other reform upon whose necessity the Herald was in complete agreement with radicals was the abolition of negro slavery - which the paper had long attacked. ibid., 19 March 1824, 18 November 1825, 27 July 1827, 24 February, 26 October 1832, 11 January 1833.

(4) Coventry Herald, 16 January, 6 November 1835, 7 October 1836, 13 January, 24 March, 8 December 1837.

onwards sharpened the tone of the Herald's attacks. Chartists were bitterly denounced. 'To say that the suffrage should be extended to every person of sound mind, and who had not been convicted by the laws of his country, would be to include all the rabble and all the unconvicted rogues in the land.'(1) As to the 'physical force' men, they were 'a set of crafty knaves', 'destructives' bent on 'carrying out the levelling process and effecting a redistribution of property ... We have not the least doubt that the immediate adoption of what is called the "Charter" would ultimately lead to that anarchy and confusion, which the physical force men would arrive at by a shorter and more direct road, though we give credit to many admirers of the five points scheme for believing otherwise.'(2) The danger of breaking the Whig-Radical alliance was greatly increased by the pursuit of these extreme plans.(3) The Herald hoped that if this alliance endured and all radicals exerted constant pressure on the Whigs, the corn laws would be repealed - and thus the great cause of poverty and distress removed. Thus the reluctance of many Coventry Chartists to support repeal - and their interruption of Anti Corn Law League meetings - was denounced by the Herald as wickedness.(4) On the other hand it was not willing to buy Chartist support for repeal by accepting the six points, or anything like them. It welcomed the Complete Suffrage Association in April 1842 because it thought the Sturgeite movement was likely to make Chartists docile supporters of repeal

(1) ibid., 7 September 1838. This leading article was prompted by Feargus O'Connor's visit to Coventry. See also ibid., 22 December 1837, 23 February, 9 March, 28 September 1838.

(2) ibid., 7 December 1838. See also ibid., 4 January, 11 January, 3 May, 9 August, 16 August, 13 September 1839, 3 January 1840, 11 March, 8 April 1842. The Herald's comment on the Chartist convention in Birmingham in 1839 was that 'they advise the labouring classes to abandon their legitimate occupations, and menace all authority with a direct attack'. 12 July 1839.

(3) See, for example, ibid., 21 September 1838:

'The Whigs, to say the worst of them, are "a squeezable material", but the Tories are an impervious block, crushing the energies and destroying the hopes of the people. The Whigs may be somewhat sluggish and dogged in their movements, but when well backed, they have occasionally taken some good strides in the onward course of improvement. The other party, the Radicals, are many of them well disposed, but they are over-sanguine, intemperate, and prone to speak and act prematurely; they are trying a round of experiments, and our only apprehension is that in this career, led as they are by some men to whose guardianship we would not trust a spaniel dog, they should damage the cause they wish to advance, by making a diversion in favour of the common enemy of themselves, no less than of the Whigs.'

(4) ibid., 22 February 1839.

and a moderate extension of the suffrage; it turned against the CSA later, when to the Herald the Sturgeite programme seemed merely to be repeal with the six points added.(1) Complete Suffrage and Chartism were 'a distinction without a difference'.(2)

One constant theme in the Herald from 1824 onwards was the unfairness to the city's staple trade of the 'free trade' in ribbons(3) announced in that year unless it were accompanied by concurrent measures (not involving the reduction of wages) to cheapen costs. At first it believed (though it disliked the corn laws) that repeal might be to the disadvantage of the poor - might be used indeed as an excuse to lower wages - and looked rather to the reduction of taxation as a means of making Coventry's industry more competitive: if this were done, the Herald had no doubt that (because of the unrivalled skill of Coventry weavers) French imports would not be a threat.(4) When in fact French imports did flood in and were partly responsible for the slump in the ribbon trade, the Herald changed its mind on the prohibitory laws and called (though not with great frequency) for their return - supporting in 1831 and 1834 the city's attempts to get them restored. It recognised in the latter year, however, that the attempt was hopeless (as of course did the city at large).(5) It afterwards denounced as absurdly atavistic the chalked legend 'No Free Trade' still

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(1) ibid., 29 April, 22 July, 29 September 1842.

(2) ibid., 19 July 1844. Apart from its aberration in 1826 (for which see Chapter Two, Section IV), at parliamentary elections the Herald consistently supported Ellice and (with strong calls for liberal unity) those radicals and others who were associated with him in a joint campaign: Fyler in 1830 and in the spring of 1831, before his lukewarmness over parliamentary reform became apparent and Bulwer stood with Ellice against him; Bulwer thereafter till the end of 1834; Williams from January 1835 onwards. The Herald consistently opposed Tories, and radicals standing in opposition to Ellice: Williams at the end of 1834 (before Bulwer's retirement and his coalition with Ellice) and of course the Chartist aspirant, Bell, in 1837. Coventry Herald, 2 July, 30 July 1830, 22 April, 29 April, 6 May 1831, 7 December, 14 December, 21 December 1832, 19 April 1833, 12 December, 19 December, 26 December 1834, 9 January 1835, 21 July 1837, 25 June, 2 July, 16 July 1841.

(3) Like everybody in Coventry, the Herald meant by 'free trade' in ribbons the relaxation of the prohibitory laws against their importation - even though imports carried heavy protective duties.

(4) ibid., 6 May, 17 June, 21 October, 11 November, 25 November, 9 December 1825, 28 July 1826.

(5) Coventry Herald, 18 November, 16 December 1831, 2 May, 23 May, 18 July 1834.

discernible on Coventry walls and as utterly delusive the Standard's arguments that all national interests should be protected and prohibition reintroduced: 'the Standard might as well tell the weavers that if sovereigns grew on hawthorn hedges they would be much better off than they are now'.(1)

Instead, the Herald pinned its hope for the restoration of prosperity, both national and local, to the repeal of the corn laws - losing by 1826 its earlier doubts about its advisability and indeed coming to regard it as the one measure essential for the elimination of distress. The corn laws (it was argued) benefited nobody except the landlords, able to raise the rents of tenant-farmers. They were a burden on towns, farmers and agricultural labourers alike, and were indeed responsible for the labourers' revolt of 1830 that the Herald so much deplored. Tinkering with them (as in the sliding scale of 1842) was useless: repeal alone would suffice. This would cheapen food without (the Herald was careful to stress) lowering wages; the fact that wages sometimes went down when the price of bread went up was pointed out. As far as Coventry was concerned, repeal was logically entailed as an act of justice to the ribbon trade, by the measures of 1826: to those who argued that duty on foreign ribbons was analogous to the protection of the agricultural interest by the corn laws the Herald replied (while emphasising its firm desire that the ribbon tariff should remain) that it provided no greater defence for the weavers of Little Park Street than the transport costs on corn from Danzig would for the wheat growers of the Avon valley, when the corn laws were repealed. Until that day, Coventry ribbons suffered from unfair 'free trade'. Repeal would by raising real wages widen the market for ribbons, and also lead to a division of economic function as between Britain and the continent which would be immensely profitable to the city: 'would it not be better for the weavers to be employed with full work making ribbons, instead of standing idle, while the Germans are driven from the ploughed field to the factory and the loom, because the Corn Law forbids them to send the produce

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(1) ibid., 4 September 1840. See also 13 September 1840, 26 March, 17 December 1841.

of their fields to England?'(1) With frequent repetition, especially in 1839, 1840, 1841 and 1843, the Herald thus argued the case for repeal. Peel's measures of 1846 were greatly welcomed.(2)

Implicit in the Herald's case for repeal was that it would be in the interests of both weaver and manufacturer. That these were truly in harmony was its attitude to the relations of masters and men in the trade itself. 'The poor cannot subsist without the capital of the rich, and the intelligence which directs the profitable employment of that capital; nor can the rich avail themselves of the advantages of their wealth, but through the instrumentality of the poor.'(3) Yet in its detailed application of this axiom, the Herald was somewhat inconsistent. It constantly argued from 1830 onwards that masters and weavers must unite to install steam-powered looms. They would face a common danger to prosperity if Manchester turned them to the profitable production of silk ribbons, while Coventry did not; the trade would then leave the city. Thus the Herald begged the people of Coventry, a few months after the burning of Beck's mill, not to follow again that unfortunate precedent and prevent manufacturers 'by force or obloquy' from adopting steam power.(4) It welcomed the coming of steam in 1835 and urged the weavers not to be illogical and quote the miseries of the Manchester hand-loom weavers as proof of the evils of the factory system; factories were not necessarily uncomfortable places.(5) Similarly, it held up for the respectful attention of the weavers the Coventry

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(1) Coventry Herald, 20 March 1840. NB that the Herald carefully evaded here the question of French competition, far more important than the German in the ribbon trade. For the Herald's case for repeal, see its leading articles of 3 November, 24 November 1826, 7 May, 18 June, 15 October, 3 December 1830, 14 January, 16 December 1831, 22 June 1832, 8 February, 22 March, 29 March, 6 September 1833, 26 September 1834, 23 March, 10 August 1838, 4 January, 18 January, 25 January, 8 February, 15 February, 29 February, 22 March, 29 March, 6 September, 27 September, 11 October, 1 November, 13 December 1839, 28 February, 13 March, 17 April, 5 June 1840, 5 March, 7 May, 27 August, 24 December 1841, 18 February 1842, 24 March, 19 May, 21 July, 22 September, 24 November 1843, 8 August, 31 October 1845.

(2) ibid., 6 February, 13 February, 20 March 1846.

(3) Coventry Herald, 30 December 1831. See also ibid., 2 September 1842, for a similar leading article.

(4) Coventry Herald, 13 April, 4 May 1832.

(5) ibid., 11 December, 18 December, 25 December 1835. To those weavers who could not accept the conventional factory system the Herald (25 December 1835) recommended the idea of cottage factories - the first mention of them. For a later panegyric of steam power, see ibid., 30 October 1840.

masters, working for fourteen hours a day - the consumer and workman profiting from his industry - and the laws of economics which forced them against their inclinations to reduce wages in an industry overstocked with labour: no strike or combination could in this situation keep wages up.(1)

Scorn was heaped on one organisation that ignored the essential harmony between weaver and master - the Warwickshire weavers' union of 1833 and 1834. It planned (the Herald alleged) to unite all weavers everywhere, against all masters - instead of seeking to unite both branches of the Coventry trade against the baleful competition of Manchester and to work with masters for the abolition of the corn laws. It planned to raise wages by industrial action - and would damage the Coventry trade permanently in the process. Its members were induced to take 'unlawful oaths' to cement this unity.(2) The strikes and riots of weavers in St. Etienne and Lyons, fermented by 'anarchists', should be a warning of the wickedness of trades union leaders in England - those 'robbers and destructives' who called for an 'equality of wages', and thus in effect for the 'spoliation alike of the capitalist and industrious working man in favour of the idle and worthless'. Fortunately, Coventry people were too sensible to be taken in by such nonsense.(3) Only 'an insane enthusiast like Robert Owen can suppose for a moment that he could live as well on the produce of eight hours' labour, as he could do upon that of twelve'.(4)

Yet, inconsistently, the Herald did admit that the union might at times prevent 'useless and mischievous' reductions in the list of prices.(5) And when it considered, not the general laws of economics (which led it to enunciate conventional political economy) but specific wage disputes in Coventry, it always found reasons why

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(1) ibid., 19 October 1827, 10 December, 24 December 1830, 10 January 1834.

(2) Coventry Herald, 13 December, 20 December 1833, 10 January, 17 January, 14 February, 21 February 1834.

(3) ibid., 18 April 1834. The Herald's comment on the large 'Tolpuddle' rally of the union branches in Warwickshire in April was that it was 'rather a spectacle than anything else. The women dressed themselves as for a holiday, and the men had only a vague notion that the institution was one from which they were to derive some good, but how they had no definite opinions.' loc. cit.

(4) Coventry Herald, 25 April 1834.

(5) ibid., 13 December 1833.

competitive wage-reductions would not assist the trade or the city. Any further reduction in the list (it argued at the time of the dispute of 1826) would lower the purchasing power of weavers and damage the entire city.(1) It commended the masters' decision (immediately after the Beck mill-burning of 1831) to implement once more the 1829 lists, recently broken: a general reduction would not have increased the consumption of ribbons and so would have impoverished the city even more: the re-enforcement of the list would have the desirable result of ending competition between masters 'and will induce every manufacturer to resort to some other means of success than that he can find in his own hardness of heart'.(2) The reduction in the list of prices in February 1835 placed the Herald in a dilemma - facing as it did the need for both the Coventry trade to be competitive and weavers and city to be spared the horrors of unrestricted wage-cutting. The Herald, remarking (truthfully) that it did not usually interfere in disputes between masters and weavers but that it regarded this one as too important to ignore, saw the reduction as bad, though necessary; it found cause for gratulation in the fact that a proper list had been agreed upon. A free-for-all in piece-work rates would have been 'mischievously cruel to weavers'.(3) When, in 1836, a few manufacturers declared their intention of reducing the list again the Herald's sympathies were with the weavers: the current stagnation arose from a want of orders, and not from any competition as to price from home or abroad; reduction would not increase sales.(4) And the reduction of 20 per cent in the list in August 1840 was bitterly regretted by the Herald, because of the effect it would have on the takings of shopkeepers and the morals of operatives; it blamed the reduction on a few thrusting manufacturers who forced the pace and compelled others to follow.(5) Attempts by weavers to maintain the list, if they involved merely moral suasion or peaceful striking - and so undertaken

(1) ibid., 21 April 1826.

(2) ibid., 11 November 1831.

(3) ibid., 13 February 1835.

(4) ibid., 18 November 1836.

(5) ibid., 21 August 1840. See ibid., 29 January 1836, for a leading article on the stealing of silk from masters by outworkers, in which the Herald sympathised with weavers and took a line opposed to the manufacturers. Some manufacturers (it argued) fined workmen for bad ribbons for whose defects poor silk was responsible, or refused to accept ribbons contracted for because they were overstocked. Many ribbons sold by weavers were rejects of this sort - not made with stolen silk.

with a view to enlisting the support of the city - the Herald did not condemn: thus it praised, in the dispute of 1830, the weavers' leaders who set their face against taking large deputations with them to interview manufacturers, since this would have looked like intimidation. The leaders' attitude, said the Herald, 'won the approbation of the entire city'.(1) Even the burning of Beck's mill was not condemned, and the Herald expressed its thanks for the remission of the death sentence on the rioters - though the window-breaking at Merridew's loom-shop in 1835 was denounced.(2)

Charles Bray bought the Herald in July 1846. His first leader struck a new note: 'The irresistible tendency of society is FORWARD, - its irreversible law is ONWARD PROGRESS'.(3) The irreversible law did not suit James Jenkins, the editor of the Herald.(4) He had (wrote Bray a few months later)

> conducted the paper for many years with great credit to himself, and considerable advantage to the public; and although he was not deemed by the new Proprietor the person exactly qualified to be Editor and entire manager of a Liberal paper, yet, any situation short of that was offered him. His leaving the paper was, therefore, entirely his own act. The Proprietor believes him to be intelligent, honest and straightforward; ... as, in the exercise of what he deemed a public trust, the Proprietor has been the unwilling means of injuring him, he freely forgives his sins against himself.(5)

Bray appointed one Spencer (not otherwise known) as editor in the autumn of 1846. Confusingly, the onetime weaver Benjamin Poole, who had been in the paper's employ for many years, continued as 'reporter and editor' concurrently with Spencer. In neither case was the title of 'editor' appropriate. In this context it meant 'sub-editor' - finding space in the journal for the insertion of lengthy articles by Charles Bray. Spencer accepted this rather menial role. Poole did not; he was a man of strong opinions who had been moving steadily to the right since he had been a member of the CPU in 1830. While in Bray's employ he wrote letters to the Standard attacking Bray's political opinions very forcefully. This action led to his dismissal in February 1852; he then joined the

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(1) ibid., 17 September 1830.

(2) ibid., 13 April 1832, 13 February 1835.

(3) ibid., 17 July 1846.

(4) ibid., 16 October 1846. Jenkins was a ribbon manufacturer of Spon Street. West, op. cit., p. 773.

(5) Coventry Herald, 1 January 1847.

Standard as 'reporter and sub-editor' and exercised his considerable powers of abuse on his old employer from this vantage-point for years.(1) Meanwhile, whether with or without the help of Poole and Spencer, the Herald became a vehicle for Bray's views. These were liberal, but broader, less sectarian and more far-sighted than those the Herald's readers had been used to. They were also expressed with far more brilliance, panache and rhetoric.

Bray celebrated the ending of the corn laws; repeal meant cheaper food and greater prosperity for Britain. He looked forward to the extension of free trade to Britain's industries; he recognised that it would be good for the nation, since it would entail each area, both local and national, concentrating on what it could most efficiently produce. (This argument, however, was presented in general terms only, and Bray did not call for the abolition of the protective duty on foreign ribbons.) Free trade, he argued before the Crimean War, would increase international understanding.(2) But free trade was not sufficient to secure national prosperity and contentment.
'Free trade is not the complement of all the wants of the age. It is but a step in the march of the nation. The tide of improvement will hide or efface all our old landmarks.'(3) The tide of improvement was collectivist action. 'Property can never be secure while millions are bordering on starvation.'(4) Yet Bray did not believe that unfettered capitalism could cure poverty.

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(1) ibid., 28 May, 4 June 1852, 29 April 1853. There seems to be no truth in Bray's assertion, in Phases of Opinion, p. 81, that Poole was dismissed for misrepresenting opponents' views as reporter for the Herald. Bray's autobiography was of course written many years later.

(2) Coventry Herald, 11 September 1846, 29 September 1848, 13 April, 4 May 1849, 10 May, 30 August, 6 September 1850, 28 February 1851, 6 January 1854. See his comment on Protection, ibid., 5 March 1852: 'Protection means treason and rebellion ... the watchword of a faction'. Bray's view in February 1854 was that the Czar would be checked by a united Europe, there would be no war, and that 'unchecked in our present progress, in twenty years war would be an impossibility. Education, the Electric Telegraph, the Rail, Colonization, Emigration, Free Trade, will have made us all of one family.' ibid., 10 February 1854. See below for Bray's views on the Crimean War.

(3) ibid., 25 June 1847.

(4) ibid., 7 April 1848.

> A population ought to be well off in proportion to its powers of production; but under the present system, in no case is what a man receives dependent upon what he produces. The labourer's share is dependent upon competition with his fellows, and the capitalist's share is dependent, not upon the largeness of his produce, but upon his disposing profitably of what he does produce. Whatever political economists may say, it is our firm conviction that the paradoxes and anomalies in this system will never right themselves, and that without some presiding intelligence, some systematic introduction of order, some organisation of our immense powers of production, supply and demand will never be properly regulated.(1)

The ideal form of social organisation would be self-contained communities, both industrial and agricultural in nature; able to produce all the necessities of life and exchanging only their surpluses, which would consist of exotic products and luxuries - and apparently these would be usually those goods that the community in question could most efficiently produce.(2) This interesting conjunction of Owenism and Cobdenite free trade theory, however, could not at present be realised because

> it pre-supposes the will and the capacity on the part of the workpeople to arrange and manage, and direct such combined operations. Such capacity, based upon strong religious feelings, and high moral and intellectual qualifications, the working classes do not yet possess.(3)

The removal of the intellectual and moral deficiencies of the working class was thus a pre-condition of a long-term aim - the achievement of Bray's ideal form of social organisation. But it had a proximate purpose too: it was

> the effectual way to ward off insane attempts to effect change by violence. Teach the people the wholesome truth, that all real Reforms must proceed from within - that without improved habits and characters, no external improvement is possible, and we shall not have absurd attempts to imitate the revolutionary explosions of the Continent.(4)

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(1) ibid., 31 March 1848. This leading article was reprinted under the title Communism (Coventry, 1848); a copy is in C.W.C.: Pamphlets Collection.

(2) loc. cit. This plan had been advanced earlier by Bray in An Essay upon the Union of Agriculture and Manufactures (London, 1844) and was the mode of social organisation suggested in The Philosophy of Necessity (London, 1863). See also Coventry Herald, 12 April 1850 for a similar plan for an Owenite community, and 2 January 1852 for his more modest advocacy of the extension of 'co-operative' principles to industry in its present locations; Bray had the post office and the railways in mind as examples of co-operative enterprise and his plan is not worked out in detail.

(3) Coventry Herald, 31 March 1848.

(4) loc. cit. See also ibid., 7 April, 20 April 1848, for other lengthy leading articles that explored the same theme.

Bray's thoughts were at their gloomiest when he wrote these words - in the spring of 1848, when he was both fascinated and repelled by the continental revolutions and the Chartist agitation at home. But he never lost (as indeed he had for long possessed) the belief that even immediate and short-term advance towards a fully civilised life was impeded by the moral turpitude of the working classes.(1) And thus, in essentials, his programme of social reform remained unchanged for many years. Delay in its implementation to anything like the extent Bray wanted, led him to be tempted by the notion of an authoritarian system of government, but he rejected it because there was no guarantee that a despotism would remain enlightened. But he wished the public service to be opened to all men of talent and nepotism ended - a line of argument which the administrative incompetence revealed by the Crimean War led Bray greatly to stress - and the executive to be controlled by a parliament in which members of both Lords and Commons were to be elected - again to choose men of talent. And since Bray thought there was too much work now for parliament to undertake (the proof advanced - apparently quite seriously - was its failure to enact Bray's reform programme) he suggested county parliaments, on the model of the American state legislatures, which would elect representatives to the Westminster assemblies. Britain would become a federation of united counties. The electorate for these local parliaments should be enlarged - despite (or rather, because of) the fact that 'the vast mass are still mentally blind and morally dead - bound soul and body to the lowest cares and enjoyments'.(2) Enfranchisement of 'the really

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(1) See, on this point, Charles Bray, The Income of the Kingdom and the Mode of its Distribution (London, 1857): which contrasts the wealth produced by the working class with the amount received (the disparity being the result of labour surplus). But employers know that with 'present standards of education among working men generally, more time and additional wages would, by the majority, be probably spent on dissipation, to the injury of the workman himself'. p. 9. Much of the pamphlet was similar jeremiad: 'I have worked with the working classes at all measures for improving their condition for a quarter of a century, but have never yet found them capable of conducting their own affairs ... The worst feature of ignorance is intolerance, and the worst of the working classes is that they cannot agree to differ. They are for the utmost freedom of thought and liberty, but denounce as knave or fool everyone who does not think as they think. They ... find very difficult to rise to the comprehension of a disinterested feeling.' pp. 14 et seq. Much of this seems to reflect Bray's feelings about the Labourers' and Artisans' Friend Society, and is a grossly distorted and self-pitiful summary of its history.

(2) Coventry Herald, 8 February 1850.

active part of the people'(1) would divide them from the dangerous poor and wean them from the popular orators - 'egotistical, noisy, boastful, disorderly, ignorant of themselves and the world'(2) - who preached the 'pitiful mockery' that 'the rich are cruel tyrants - the poor, ignorant lambs', and would also be a 'powerful means of rousing them to a proper sense of their position and true interests, and is thus one of the levers by which society will be advanced another and higher stage in the history of civilisation'.(3) But the enfranchisement of 'the large mass, who are still unable to read and write, who are so ignorant as to take for gospel the most extravagant assertions of the most notorious demagogues ... would, in fact, introduce a system of class legislation calculated to unhinge and prematurely break up our ticklishly complicated state of society'.(4) Or, Bray thought in 1856, universal suffrage might lead to the choice of another simplist doctrine - Conservatism.(5) But whatever his specific fears of its effects, Bray always remained apprehensive at the prospect of democracy - and his gloom could be provoked by trivial circumstances:

> We cannot say that we view with much favour any proposition that would at once transfer political power from the educated to the uneducated classes: its first effect would be to lower the standard of public opinion to the level of the comprehension of the majority ... reflect on the opposition to the authorities, and to the real interests of the Town, at the late removal of the Fair.(6)

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(1) ibid., 21 January 1850.
(2) ibid., 5 March 1852.
(3) ibid., 8 February 1850.
(4) ibid., 1 November 1850. Cp. Bray's comments on Ernest Jones's speech in Coventry in August 1851: 'Mischief and danger would come out of the People's Charter, with our unprepared population. We are, therefore, no advocates for the Charter, but for such an extension of the Suffrage as will fairly represent the intellect and worth of the nation - such a system as will admit the people to the fullest power, in proportion as their own self-dependent and industrious habits show them to be qualified to use it with safety and advantage.' ibid., 29 August 1851.
(5) ibid., 21 November 1856.
(6) ibid., 5 November 1858. Bray referred here to the Great Fair scandal of 1858: on which see Chapter Eight, Section I. Bray bitterly attacked over this matter the selfish concern for a narrow self-interest displayed by the freemen, and in particular their leader, William Taunton, who should have known better. ibid., 23 April, 14 May, 4 June, 11 June 1858. Similarly, Bray consistently attacked those freemen who opposed the enclosure of the Lammas lands altogether, and those who asked for land, not money, in return for the extinction of their right - until the intransigence of the freemen on this latter issue convinced Bray, in 1854, that compensation in land was essential: ibid., 15 December 1848, 19 September, 26 September, 17 October 1851, 1 April, 11 November 1853, 27 January, 11 August, 11 October 1854, 1 June 1855. Bray welcomed the abortive reform bill of 1854, which provided for the disenfranchisement of all future freemen. ibid., 17 February 1854.

The calculus between a benign extension and a prudent restriction of the franchise was a nice one: Bray resolved it by pressing, from 1846 to 1860, for a ratepaying householder's suffrage - together with the ballot, (to cut out the evil of treating) equal electoral districts and triennial parliaments.(1)

Meanwhile, he urged upon a parliament as yet unreformed a large-scale programme of social engineering:

> the great want is some general comprehensive scheme of national reform.(2) What we have to do is, to improve the habits and character of the people - dig them out of their filthy homes - place the means of cleanliness within their reach - put down drunkenness by all available means - and take care that every poor man's child be properly educated.(3)

Thus Bray was an ardent advocate of public health legislation and the implementation by the city of the legislation, inadequate though he thought it was, that was enacted - since he saw a close connection between dirt and disease on the one hand and poverty and moral depravity on the other. He praised private attempts (such as Lord Ashley's) to build improved dwellings for the working classes. He pressed for planned emigration to Britain's colonies to remove the labour surplus which until his plan for self-contained industrial villages was implemented would be endemic and would therefore degrade into poverty and vice the working class as a whole. He pressed for an improved penal system to reform the morals of the criminals produced by a defective social system - the separate system being the one favoured by Bray. For the paupers likewise produced by it, Bray pressed for workhouses to be truly houses where meaningful and self-supporting labour was the rule for all - so that they might acquire habits of providence and industry.(4)

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(1) In addition to the references already given, see for this paragraph the leading articles in Coventry Herald, 19 May, 9 June 1848, 26 July 1850, 3 October 1851, 13 February 1852, 18 March 1853, 6 January, 24 February 1854, 23 March, 30 March, 5 April, 18 May, 17 August 1855, 5 March 1858, 21 January 1859.
(2) ibid., 10 November 1848.
(3) ibid., 31 March 1848.
(4) This plan Bray advocated first with respect to Ireland in the aftermath of the famine. He had in mind paupers' tilling waste land to bring it into cultivation. He later extended the plan to Britain. These plans of 'general reform' were advocated continually by Bray. For the chief leading articles see Coventry Herald, 31 July 1846 ('the bath must be a daily, at least a weekly practice'), 28 May 1847, 14 July, 28 July, 1 September, 15 December 1848, 19 January, 9 February, 16 February, 25 May, 29 June, 20 July, 27 July, 21 August, 16 November, 28 December 1849, 4 January, 25 January, 12 April, 12 July, 20 September 1850, 3 January, 21 February, 17 April, 7 November, 28 November, 5 December, 12 December 1851, 4 June, 3 September, 17 September, 1 October, 24 December, 31 December 1852, 7 January, 2 December 1853, 20 January 1854, 29 June 1855, 13 June 1856, 9 April 1857.

For Bray, one local phenomenon was more than any other responsible for the creation of paupers in Coventry - the dense mass of eleemosynary charities. 'Charities are a curse to a place, not a blessing.' They encouraged improvidence, thriftlessness and a reckless disregard among weavers of the prudential rule that they should in good times save against the bad - instead of relying in the latter upon the generosity of others.(1) Bray thus even attacked the collection of funds to supply bread to the unemployed in times of slump in the ribbon trade, and alone in the city approved the Charity Commissioners' scheme of 1856 for the diversion of alms to education.(2) Instead of the degrading and pauperising lure of charity, Bray preached the bracing rigours of self-help - praising those institutions in the city, such as benefit and building societies, and the Freehold Land Society, that were calculated to encourage it.(3)

(1) Coventry Herald, 14 July 1854. See also ibid., 19 December 1856.

(2) ibid., 16 February 1855, 11 January, 8 February, 29 February 1856, 4 December 1857. Bray added that those really unable to support themselves during times of slump should be given poor relief (outdoors because of the numbers involved) - the need for which would be tested - rather than indiscriminate and degrading bread doles. Bray's views on charity came under strong attack from the Coventry Standard. 'An Old Weaver' pointed out that the funds disbursed by the charities amounted to merely a few shillings a year for each inhabitant - scarcely a pauperising amount, while the rules of the charities prevented individuals from receiving gifts frequently. More tellingly, 'An Old Weaver' argued that if self-reliance were good for the poor it would be good for the middle classes too; Charles Bray should seek to acquire virtue by living on very little. 'But it is because this gentleman is one of the silver-fork school, who knows nothing personally about the bringing up of a family; who never knew what it was to depend upon his own earnings for the presentation of a Sunday's dinner upon his table - who was never taught self-reliance, self-restraint, nor frugality by the stern hand of necessity; it is because he is an impertinent theorist ... that his lessons to the working classes on the virtues of prudence and self-restraint, receive just what they deserve - contempt and scorn.' Coventry Standard, 21 July 1854. 'An Old Weaver' was Benjamin Poole, Bray's old employee and enemy. Coventry Herald, 28 July 1854. See also Coventry Standard, 11 December 1857, letter from 'No Dog in the Manger' on the same theme. 'The best experiment to make with (Mr. Bray), would be to reduce him at once to the "natural laws" of which he is so fond of talking; give him a new start in life, with nothing more than a suit of fustian to stand up in, set him in Broad Gate at 6 o'clock some fine Monday morning, open to all bidders for the services of either his hand or his arm, and let him earn his dinner before he eats, and show how much his savings will amount to at the end of the year.' William Taunton published a pamphlet (now lost) attacking Bray's views on charity and improvidence. Coventry Herald, 18 December 1857.

(3) Coventry Herald, 21 July 1848, 5 April 1849, 9 August, 20 September, 4 October, 18 October, 25 October 1850, 15 August, 22 August, 29 August 1851. Bray was one of the leading supporters in these years of the Self-Supporting Dispensary: started in opposition to the General Dispensary which dispensed gratuitous medical aid to the poor. The Self-Supporting Dispensary gave aid to subscribers - whose payments (with help from the 'honorary fund' provided by gentle or affluent supporters) paid the physicians' salaries.

But strongly expressed in Bray's leaders was the belief that self-help was insufficient to achieve the moral regeneration of the poor: and the inadequacy, while this was unrealised, of cheap food, public health, poor law, political and penal reforms (essential though these were) to create a stable society where gross poverty was eliminated and property secure. 'No amount of free trade - no accomplishment of the charter - no political or social change whatever, will materially alter the condition of society, so long as the propensities of men are in the ascendant.'(1) So many of the lines of advance that Bray suggested were blocked by ignorance, depravity and fecklessness. These obstacles could only be removed by education: which was thus the keystone of his reform programme. 'The true regenerator of society will be the schoolmaster.'(2) He would

> refine and elevate ... moral feelings - and thus ... give the man, of whatever rank or condition of life, 'a kingdom within himself' ... which will render him independent of and superior to grosser pleasures, that enervate his powers, and debase his dignity as an intellectual being.(3)

Something could be done to improve the quality of education by the encouragement of self-help: thus Bray favoured the introduction of public libraries and the abolition of the taxes on knowledge for precisely this motive, and gave some praise to the Mechanics' Institution in his articles on self-help in the city.(4) But self-help and voluntary institutions were inadequate to the great task. The desultory, fragmented and inaccessible instruction presented in the Mechanics' Institution, by amateurs, pointed up (said Bray) the need for paid teachers with a dedicated professional concern: and, as importantly, the experience of the Mechanics' Institution was that many working men lacked the elementary education to take advantage of even the good adult classes offered and had left the institution to the middle classes. Working men 'ward off as best they can present evils, and indulge in present pleasures, - after work, the rude meal, and then the ramble, the pipe(5), the gossip,

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(1) ibid., 31 January 1851.

(2) Coventry Herald, 25 October 1850.

(3) ibid., 2 October 1846. See also ibid., 18 May, 7 December 1849, 6 February 1852 for similar expressions of opinion.

(4) ibid., 12 October, 30 November 1849, 14 May, 29 October 1852.

(5) Bray was a non-smoker.

the game, the cheap entertainment, or the pot-house'.(1)

For the elementary education of children which Bray regarded as essential to improve the morals and industry of 'the foul sediment of our town population'(2) the voluntary system then operating in Britain he regarded as totally inadequate in quantity and restrictive and stultifying in quality - as inculcating (he alleged) narrow sectarian prejudices instead of the higher moral purpose. 'Our religious guides, of all denominations, determine that the great majority of the country's children shall continue in a state of practical atheism and real infidelity, rather than they should be taught any but their own peculiar and distinctive dogmas.'(3) Bray found the Church of England at least less narrow in spirit than the dissenters by the time he took over the Herald, whatever its exclusiveness and intolerance earlier. In the previous ten years 'Dissenters and Churchmen have changed places. The Dissenters are petitioning against any Government interference whatever; and the Church party, seeing the positive necessity for more and better education, have at last consented to be put, in this respect, on a perfect equality with all other sects.'(4) For years thereafter, Bray incessantly denounced the 'voluntaryist fanatics' - meaning by them in particular some of the dissenters, led in Coventry by John Gordon and John Sibree - and advocated a national system of elementary education, state-provided and maintained, 'secular' (Bray's word for it) but more, rather than less, truly religious on that account - more likely to encourage true morality: since besides 'reverence to the Supreme Being'(5) it would teach obedience to all God's laws'(6), which meant 'the laws of necessity -

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(1) Coventry Herald, 5 October 1849. See also 14 December 1849, 4 October 1850, 29 October 1852, 4 July, 17 October 1856.

(2) ibid., 28 September 1849.

(3) Coventry Herald, 12 February 1847.

(4) ibid., 19 March 1847. For other details of Bray's savage quarrel with Coventry dissenters during the education controversy of 1847, see Chapter Seven, Section IV, above. See also Coventry Herald, 24 July 1846, for a leading article welcoming the statement of the Rev. W.F. Hook, vicar of Leeds and onetime vicar of Holy Trinity, Coventry (and an acquaintance of Bray's) that he now recognised the need for a larger measure of state support for education and the concurrent abandonment of old sectarian attitudes.

(5) Coventry Herald, 26 April 1850.

(6) ibid., 8 October 1852.

physical, moral, intellectual, social and political, economic'.(1) 'Will our religious lights and guides permit this education? Will they consent to forgo their miserable monopoly of mental culture ... and join in doing that great act of justice to the people which will enable them to ward off the fate which has awaited all previous civilisations?'(2)

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(1) ibid., 27 May 1853. NB too Bray's comments on the curriculum at the Free Grammar School, ibid., 24 March 1854: 'The study of Latin and Greek may be useful as a mental discipline ... but the study of Nature is a much higher discipline'.

(2) ibid., 20 August 1852. See also the important leading articles on 'national education' and the inadequacy of the voluntary system, ibid., 11 September 1846, 26 March, 9 April, 23 April, 22 October 1847, 21 December 1849, 22 February, 1 March, 22 March 1850, 24 January, 25 April, 16 May, 30 May 1851, 6 February, 12 March, 19 March, 31 December 1852, 28 January, 15 April, 22 April, 6 May 1853, 18 August 1854, 23 March, 26 October 1855, 18 April, 25 April, 27 June, 31 October 1856, 9 January, 20 February, 24 April 1857. Bray's reference to the 'Supreme Being' does not mean that he was in any sense a Christian, or that he was attempting to find in beliefs common to all Christian faiths an ecumenical solution of the sectarian wrangles that bedevilled the education question. In his youth Bray moved so far from the nonconformist Protestantism in which he had been brought up that he rejected even Unitarianism and arrived at his necessitarian philosophy - of which an essential part was that God was merely an attribute of the universal force of which mind and matter were several expressions; God was immanent in Nature. See Charles Bray, Phases of Opinion, pp. 10 et seq, 199 et seq; The Philosophy of Necessity, passim. Leading Dissenters in Coventry, besides resenting Bray's attacks on voluntaryism, of course rejected his necessitarianism utterly. Four dissenting ministers, including John Sibree and John Gordon, denounced the Herald in 1852. 'It habitually neglects those questions which are most intimately connected with the political welfare of the country, and directs its main efforts to questions of Social Science.' Coventry Standard, 21 May 1852. See also the acrid controversy between Bray, E.H. Delf and Sibree over the Philosophy of Necessity, Coventry Herald, 30 April 1852, 22 August, 29 August 1856. John Gordon and Sibree founded a nonconformist journal to push the voluntaryist cause, the Coventry Advertiser, a feeble child that expired after two months of life in the summer of 1852. ibid., 28 May 1852. See also ibid., 31 March 1854, for Bray's valedictory address to Gordon on leaving Coventry: he praised his personal qualities but denounced his leadership of the voluntaryists and the fact that he had 'done much injury to the cause of Popular Instruction'. Bray's quarrel with Sibree (though not Gordon) was exacerbated by his denunciation of teetotalism as 'fanaticism': the natural law counselled moderation. ibid., 2 March 1855. But under Bray's control the Herald continued to advocate the abolition of church rates: ibid., 23 March 1849, 2 June 1854, 20 April 1855. It should be added that Bray's rift with some leading dissenters did not bring the friendship of the Standard, which had equal cause to dislike his views and whose pages are filled with attacks on him.

Though Bray approved of the demands for franchise reform made by the radicals of the Financial Reform Association and, later, the Parliamentary and Financial Reform Association - and their calls for the reduction of waste in government expenditure - he disliked their anti-collectivist bias. Britain needed efficient, not cheap, government, and efficiency entailed expenditure.(1) Likewise, Bray persistently attacked in the columns of the Herald those groups in the city - with Wilmot the reactionary Tory and William Taunton and George Hemming the radicals prominent in them - which demanded in the 1850s that the local board of health should moderate its sewering of the city in favour of lower rates.(2) On national expenditure, Bray disagreed with many radicals that defence offered a fruitful field for retrenchment. A large army and navy were necessary, he warned Cobden, to civilise and protect the empire Britain had won: so as not to 'yield up all the advantages of our vast and progressive civilisation to the inroad of Goths and Vandals' - despite Bray's concurrent belief that in the long term change was working for good.(3) In 1847 France was the enemy Bray especially feared. By 1853 it was Russia. Bray attacked the Peace Society, denounced Russian plans to rob Turkey and her barbarism at Sinope, and thought by January 1854 that war with Russia would be a 'great war of principle' - though he believed that a united Europe would check the czar without it. A few months later the Herald regarded the war as just and denounced Cobden and Bright in a bitter leading article - 'Nicholas to the Quakers, Greeting'.(4)

(1) Coventry Herald, 24 November 1848, 12 January, 2 February, 20 April 1849. It was partly for this reason that Bray argued, against much opposition, in favour of the income tax in 1848: see Chapter Seven, Section V.

(2) ibid., 26 October, 23 November 1849, 24 September, 1 October 1852, 19 February 1858 (Bray's plea, in a question that agitated the city council for months, for a higher salary for Greatorex, the surveyor), 22 October 1858 (an attack on the Ratepayers' Protection Association, led by Taunton and Nathaniel Poole, the freemen's leader). See also his attack on the Anti-Centralisation Union and his praise of Southwood Smith: ibid., 21 August 1857.

(3) ibid., 6 September 1850. See also 29 December 1848, 9 March 1849, 8 April 1852.

(4) ibid., 19 December 1847, 4 February, 8 April, 27 July, 12 December 1853, 27 January, 10 February, 10 March, 7 April 1854. Bray's war aims in 1854 were for the Crimea to become a free state to exercise a civilising influence on Russia, for Poland to become independent, and for Russia to pay indemnities. He applauded Palmerston's becoming Prime Minister as likely to lead to a more vigorous campaign. But by the summer of 1855 Bray had changed his mind; after saving Turkey from Russian aggression Britain ought to have made peace so as to allow the healing influence of free trade and commerce to liberalise Europe. 'We want Italy and Hungary emancipated, and the great antagonist of freedom crippled and destroyed. But all this will be better brought about without revolution, by the slow growth of

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During the war-scare of 1859 Bray denounced Derby and Lyndhurst for insulting France by suggesting that she was planning war, but nevertheless approved strongly of the Volunteer movement and once again attacked the Quakers whose influence had been exerted to weaken Britain's defences. 'Woe betide the nation that is dependent solely upon the hireling for the defence of its native hearths.'(1) Bray was an imperialist, but his imperialism was enlightened. He pleaded years before the Indian Mutiny for 'justice' for India - for more power and less taxation for the Indians, and more considerate treatment by Britons. He believed that the mutiny was caused by British tyranny, urged Britain not to imitate during the reconquest the atrocities that her misrule had provoked, and afterwards, while insisting that Britain should hold on to India because of the advantages of western civilisation, thought that she should show more tolerance for Indian religions and build roads and railways.(2)

There were, he wrote, two sides in Britain on the collectivist issue.

> Free Traders generally, with Hume, Cobden, our present Government, and their organ the Economist, ... are for giving unfettered play to the principle of competition. On the other side, The Times, ... Carlyle, Lord Ashley, and a host of the most thoughtful and benevolent men of the age, backed by the failure of the Voluntary Principle in Education, the increase in pauperism and crime, the immense neglect of the health and morals of the people in our large centres of wealth and industrial activity, declare that the principle of competition is not sufficient to effect all that is required.(3)

Bray thus found the liberal leaders and the city's M.P.s deficient in reforming zeal: he regretted, for example, that Lord John Russell

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(4) cont.
mind.' By April 1856 Bray also thought that Bright had been 'much abused'. ibid., 27 October 1854, 5 January, 9 February, 16 February, 16 March, 15 June, 10 August 1855, 25 January, 2 April 1856.

(1) ibid., 8 July, 26 August 1859.

(2) ibid., 10 June 1853, 19 June, 3 July, 9 October 1857, 15 January, 5 February, 16 April 1858.

(3) Coventry Herald, 17 May 1850. See also Bray's reference to the confusion of political alignments after corn law repeal, and the need for a union of honest men of all parties to effect the social reform necessary. ibid., 3 September 1847. See also his attack on Bright and his associates because of their opposition to legislation on smoke pollution: 'These gentlemen's notions of freedom of trade would, if fully carried out, leave sociaty a prey to the greediest instincts of our nature'. ibid., 13 July 1849.

showed no interest in his programme for general change, that a more dynamic reformer than Strutt had not been chosen by Coventry liberals in 1851, and, apparently, that Ellice was so cautious. But he regarded the Conservatives as even less likely on balance to enact his reforms and at every election backed the liberal candidates in Coventry, with pleas for liberal unity, just as the Herald had done under the much more conventional previous proprietorship.(1)

On the staple trade of the city the Herald, under Bray's control, displayed inconsistent and contradictory attitudes. One line of thought was an enlightened apology for industrial capitalism and the factory system. Frightened by the chronic surplus of labour in Coventry, and both dispirited and exhilarated by growing competition, from home and abroad, Bray stressed in this mood the need to cheapen costs, to revive productivity, to embrace steam factories, to protect the manufacturers' profits that provided the capital necessary to build them. 'The future of Coventry must be, not war with whatever cheapens production, but efficiency and economy in manufacture, and America and the world for our customers.' (2) These words were written at the height of the factory boom in Coventry. A few weeks earlier Bray had praised the manufacturers then building such light, well ventilated structures, and had warned the Coventry weavers not to oppose them: if factories did not become general the trade would desert the city for more productive climes altogether. Those who alleged the low morality of these workplaces were indicting 'the low moral and intellectual condition' of the weavers, not the system.(3) It was the duty of the manufacturer, Bray had earlier written, to look after his workpeople paternistically.

(1) ibid., 16 October 1846, 9 July, 23 July, 30 July, 6 August 1847, 4 April 1851, 14 May, 28 May, 11 June, 18 June, 25 June, 2 July, 9 July 1852, 24 November, 8 December 1854, 13 March, 20 March, 27 March, 3 April 1857, 15 April, 21 April, 28 April 1859.

(2) Coventry Herald, 11 May 1855. See also ibid., 11 March 1853 - another lengthy demonstration of the need for high productivity.

(3) ibid., 27 April 1855. See also C. Bray, The Industrial Employment of Women (London, 1857), p. 5 on this last point: 'If in factories the majority were good, they would make the bad better; but when the majority are bad, they soon make the few good as bad as themselves.' These sentiments enraged the Factory Operatives Association: see the letters of factory weavers in Coventry Herald, 4 May, 11 May 1855, and that by Richard Hartopp in Coventry Standard, 4 May 1855, 'The Philosophy of Necessity, Social Science and the Factory System' - in which Hartopp asks why, if factories were necessary, many manufacturers did well without them, and, if the evils of factories were the fault of the operatives, what became of Bray's Philosophy of Necessity. If the factory system was good, why did it not make the workmen in it better? In a letter in ibid., 18 May 1855 Hartopp returns to these themes.

by providing schools, cottages and savings banks: this would make them happier, because more moral and temperate - but also, by the same token, more efficient producers.(1)

At the same time, workpeople must be brought to a realisation that their interests and their masters' were truly in harmony, since high profits were to the advantage of all: this intellectual conversion was a prime function of education in the Philosophy of Necessity.

> It is necessary that the people should be educated, to enable them to make a right use of the Suffrage; - it is necessary as a preventive of crime and vice; - it is necessary as a foundation for their moral and material welfare, and their more complete spiritual culture ... Give the people intelligence - ally labour to thought - and capital, hitherto the master, if not the tyrant of the working man, becomes his friend and his servant.(2)

'Capital, Skill and Labour must be ever united, - headwork and handwork, - to insure success in any great branch of industry.'(3) Thus Bray recommended trades unions to take up co-operative production rather than fight employers. He condemned the weavers who after the passing of the Ten Hours Bill, which necessarily reduced the masters' profits for a week's work, attempted to get as much in wages as they had before it; if they succeeded, the long-term results would be as disastrous for them as their masters - the reduction of profits and of competitiveness, with foreign and domestic producers. The laws of supply and demand must triumph. Similarly, Ratliffs' weavers were quite wrong to strike for a breakfast break in 1850; they should instead have trusted their masters, and if they found the lack of a break damaged their efficiency as workmen they should ask for one. Cash's weavers were wrong to strike against payment by the piece in 1856; again, their masters' profits would suffer. In the same mood, Bray declared against legislation limiting the working hours of men factory operatives,

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(1) Coventry Herald, 27 September 1850.

(2) Coventry Herald, 16 April 1852. NB too Bray's comment on Ernest Jones's speech in Coventry in August 1851, in which Jones had preached that there was a fundamental antagonism between classes. 'Now this is a most false and mischievous doctrine. To divide the capitalist from the labourer ... is reversing the known and acknowledged laws of political economy, and it can only be by the aid of the capitalist that labour can rise.' ibid., 29 August 1851. Cf Bray's denunciation of the 'popular orators' who argued that 'the rich are cruel tyrants - the poor, injured lambs. This pitiful mockery should be ended.' ibid., 8 February 1850.

(3) ibid., 20 May 1853.

though he favoured restricting the hours of women and children, unable to protect themselves.(1)

But there was another mood, another tone, another attitude, equally powerful and continuous: in which Bray sympathised closely with the views and aspirations of weavers. In this mood Bray admitted that he could not blame weavers for striking for higher wages.(2) He welcomed the direct or indirect statutory restriction of the hours of men, partly because it was an act of decency and common sense - 'humanity should be protected from the encroachments of inordinate selfishness'(3) - and partly because it served to reduce the vast mechanical productive power which, Bray at times could see, was a chief cause of the labour surplus for whose future he was so anxious.(4) Above all, this Bray sympathised with the weavers' dislike of working in steam factories,(5) and, when denouncing the corrupting power of the steam factory, broadened his indictment to include, besides the aggregation of immoral weavers therein, the factory system itself, which made 'its inroad upon family habits and family ties'(6), forced young mothers to neglect the young children who would play happily by the side of the looms at home, and drew young girls by high wages beyond the reach of the

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(1) Coventry Herald, 28 April 1848, 4 October, 25 October 1850, 20 February 1852, 13 April 1855, 26 September 1856.

(2) Coventry Herald, 5 May 1854. Bray added, however, that for masters to share their profits with them would be ruinous. This leading article - long, prolix, bewildered - reveals Bray as looking for some means of explaining to masters and men that they were mutually necessary and of getting them to behave decently to each other so that both were happy. His persistent faith in the power of human reason to make clear underlying harmonies is also shown in his advocacy, during the troubled 1850s, of tribunals to settle differences between weavers and masters. ibid., 29 February, 22 August 1856, 14 May 1858.

(3) ibid., 21 June 1850. NB too Bray's qualification that evasions of the factory acts were practised not by Coventry masters but by 'the race of fast and anxious men, the go-ahead Manchester school'. ibid., 15 October 1852. This was before James Hart came to Coventry.

(4) ibid., 28 April 1848. NB too the leading article of 1 August 1851, in which Bray saw the need fornew markets as a result of the growth of machinery: 'As regards the ribbon trade of this city one thing is very certain, that such an immense increase cannot take place in machinery, in our producing power, without additional markets, if we are to keep up the average prosperity of the last ten years'.

(5) ibid., 28 May 1847.

(6) ibid., 11 July 1851. See also ibid., 8 August 1851, and Phases of Opinion, pp. 41 et seq.

parental discipline common in the domestic top-shop. Thus Bray argued for years that the cottage factory was a means of reconciling efficiency with morality, 'to give the advantage of the factory to families who might thus be as individual and exclusive as upon the old system'.(1) Significantly, Bray himself, for all his preaching of the laws of political economy, paid as a ribbon master by the list of prices.(2)

The antinomical nature of Bray's views was most clearly shown in the Herald during the long dispute of 1858 and 1859. Leading articles warned that there was great danger that the weavers would so much hamper the most productive part of the trade that it would be unable to compete with looms elsewhere.

> Wherever steam has been found applicable to textile manufactures, our superior energy, enterprise, and machinery, as in the cotton trades, have always commanded the markets of the world; and what has been the case in cotton will be the case in silk, unless the energy and enterprise of our manufacturers should be checked, and superior machinery made comparatively useless by the jealousy of competitors, or by the short-sighted policy of the hands themselves.(3)

Bray asked the weavers to substitute, for envy of the masters' wealth, understanding of the toil necessary to acquire it.

> Let them think of it, and of the wearing anxiety that must attend such a business; and that the gifts of an All-wise Providence, as far as the essentials of true happiness are concerned, may be much more equally distributed than they suppose.(4)

Above all, they must learn the truths of political economy.

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(1) Coventry Herald, 13 April 1854. See also ibid., 18 September 1857 for a similar opinion. For a full consideration of Bray and the cottage factory, see Chapter Five, Section II.

(2) At a meeting of ribbon weavers in St. Mary's Hall in March 1850, over the refusal of H. and C. Bray to pay the usual prices for fancy ribbon, F. Haymes said: 'two men of one name, sustaining such opposite characters, could not be found in any other town in England ... Mr. Charles Bray of Much Park Street, and Mr. Charles Bray of Earl Street. The latter was the drag weight that hangs like a millstone round our necks, preventing our social progress; the other had the honour and gratitude of the working men of Coventry. Applause.' Coventry Herald, 15 March 1850. And, paradoxically, the strikers whom in 1848 Bray condemned in the Herald thanked him for the help he had given them in providing statistics of the profits of a steam factory. His own hands thanked him for his kindness to them. Coventry Standard, 4 June 1848.

(3) Coventry Herald, 15 October 1858. On the growing menace of foreign competition, see the leading article in ibid., 7 January 1859.

(4) ibid., 4 February 1859.

> What a man requires, or what a master would like to pay, has nothing whatever to do with the rate of wages, and to assert the contrary is circulating the most deadly mental poison and the veriest clap-trap that it is possible to conceive. Wages depend upon the law of supply and demand - and if by any artificial restrictions, by supporting a list, or by paying a man what he requires and what a master therefore would like to pay, the costs of production were increased beyond what similar goods could be produced for elsewhere, the effect would be that we should lose the trade, and there would soon be no wages at all.(1)

And yet Bray sympathised with the weavers far more than these abrasive words imply: nor did he follow his rigorous logic to its conclusion. During the lock-out dispute of 1858 he maintained a stance of anguished neutrality, praising the temperate conduct of the weavers but reprobating both their extreme demands and the inflexibility of the Bunch of Six. Bray wished the outdoor trade to be protected from the effects of competition from the most advanced factories. Thus in his leading article at the ending of the lock-out Bray welcomed the gaining of the list for factories precisely on these grounds: but, displaying his extreme capacity for prevarication, at the same time condemned it because the thrusting masters had lost their motive to improve their machinery. 'The present arrangement cannot stand - it will only be temporary. Already we have heard a manufacturer say "If we had anticipated the present arrangements, we should not have made the alterations we did some time ago".'(2) Bray suggested during the lock-out a resolution of the quarrel between masters and men by compromise: an 'equivalent', payable as bonuses or premiums on fixed weekly wages, which would have raised the earnings of hands in the most modern factories to something nearly equal to those of the outdoor weavers on power-looms, without hampering fatally the competitive position of the thrusting masters. Ratliffs, the piece-paying

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(1) ibid., 10 June 1859. Cf ibid., 17 June 1859: 'The Political Economist has no more power over the laws of Political Economy than the astronomer has over the motions of the heavenly bodies'.

(2) ibid., 29 October 1858. NB also the leading article in ibid., 7 January 1859. 'The strife between masters and men ... has terminated in a decision which cannot be maintained, and which, if it could, would militate against the best interests of both masters and workmen. To increase production by improvements in machinery, without increasing the amount and, therefore, the cost of labour, is in the interest of the trade; and this is impossible when the "hand" is in all cases paid by the piece. To say that the master is paid sufficiently by the increased work, is simply ridiculous: for if a manufacturer wishes for increased work in the general state of the trade, he has only to take on more hands, without the expense of improving his machinery.'

factory masters, had suggested an 'equivalent' in August: but theirs was intended really to eliminate superior competition and as such was rejected by the Bunch of Six. Bray's equivalent was something less - and as far as the weavers were concerned was open to the fatal objection that anything which did not cripple the most modern factories was inadequate. Intransigent during the lock-out, the Bunch of Six did not favour Bray's equivalent either, though their proposal for extra loom-hire for very large looms, which they advanced at the conference called by the Local Board of Health and which was there rejected by the weavers, came close to it.(1)

Bray remained opposed to the agreement of October 1858 in the months that followed. Yet he avowed his wish to see the list maintained, since it was in the interest of both the outdoor trade and many factory weavers. But its obligatory imposition on all did not suit either the long-term interests of the trade as a whole or the short-term advantage of the inexperienced weavers who could earn more by weekly wages and who, Bray claimed to have discovered, amounted to one-third of the total. He therefore believed that their conflicting interests would be reconciled by the continuance of the piece-work list for those factory weavers who desired it and the reintroduction of weekly wages for the weavers who preferred them: weekly wages, that is, fixed at the level of what an <u>average</u> hand could earn on piece-work, to enable manufacturer and weaver to share the increment of higher productivity.(2)

> A system of piece-work only in factories cannot be maintained, neither is it desirable that it should be, for it is not to the permanent interest of either masters or men, inasmuch as it is a premium upon old, inefficient, and worn-out looms, and stands directly opposed to England's greatest strength - her vastly increasing and improving machinery.(3)

But there was a remedy:

> Let those who are clever, and can do best upon piece-work, demand, if they like, to be paid by it ... We object, however, to the majority, who wish to be paid by piece-work, coercing the minority, who wish to be paid by a weekly wages list ... If a workman cannot earn sufficient money in any given nature of work, we think he is quite at liberty to leave it ... this is but fair competition.(4)

This fair competition should be enforced by the magistrates and police - by their guaranteeing free access to work for those who

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(1) For this paragraph, see the leading articles in ibid., 3 September, 17 September, 1 October, 15 October, 29 October 1858.

(2) This plan was in effect the old notion of an 'equivalent'.

(3) <u>Coventry Herald</u>, 3 June 1859.

(4) ibid., 28 January 1859.

preferred weekly wages.(1)

Bray's belief that beneath surface conflicts there lay a natural harmony of interests - and that this calm centre might be reached by recognising the beneficent power of individual freedom - was fatally flawed. The underlying harmony was a mirage, and the means proposed for achieving it would have destroyed the prosperity of the majority of weavers: weekly wages, even though reinforced with bonuses as he suggested, would have given the thrusting masters a cost-advantage over the less efficient, and over the outdoor trade. To admit a real alternative to the factory list would have destroyed the list itself - which Bray said he wished to maintain.(2) In addition, Bray assumed for his argument that there was a large number of weavers who wanted weekly wages. The difficulty the thrusting masters had in obtaining blacklegs, and even more, the lack of any evidence of strong conflict of principle within the weavers' association in 1858 and 1859, tend to negate this assumption. Since the overwhelming majority of weavers were united behind the factory-list system, there would have been no advantage to the masters in the system that he suggested, of free choice by weavers of their modes of payment. In the crisis, both weavers and thrusting masters were forced to attempt total victory over the other. The weakness at the heart of Bray's brand of liberalism was his sentimental refusal to recognise the inevitability of conflict and coercion.

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(1) For this paragraph, see, besides the references given, the leading articles of 17 June, 24 June 1859.

(2) The Coventry Weekly Times cogently pointed out Bray's logical absurdities and inconsistencies.

II

The Coventry Standard

The oldest newspaper in Coventry was the Mercury, founded in 1741.(1) By 1830 it had a distinctly old-fashioned air, having not moved out of the eighteenth-century newspaper form to compete with the Herald, which claimed a circulation four times greater, apparently about 600.(2) The Mercury had no leading articles to make detailed analysis of its views possible, though its Toryism is apparent from its news columns. Even these were meagre, and justified the charge of the radical David Smith that for 7d the reader got 'a precious tale of clerical preferments and fox-hound meetings' by way of local news that could not be taken from the London press.(3) The paper was owned by William Reader (the antiquary) and the widow of his partner Rollason. The latter's son, Charles Aris Noah Rollason, was accused by Reader of raising 'systematic impediments and obstructions' in the 1830s to the improvements which Reader, knowing the business had fallen off, wished to realise.(4) There was great dissatisfaction among conservatives in Coventry over their lack of a proper journal; in

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(1) V.C.H. Warks, viii, p. 223.

(2) Coventry Herald, 3 June 1831.

(3) ibid., 27 July 1832.

(4) Reader wrote that Rollason 'was determined to have the whole of the business in his own hands, - although no printer and certainly not qualified to become its director. His influence with his mother prevented the enlargement of the Mercury several years before the dissolution of the partnership: every, and any improvement suggested by Mr. Reader was negatived or opposed at his instigation: and he never ceased his silent and ruinous persecution till he had effected his object. His self-sufficient and overbearing temper led him to commit the most heartless ingratitude. But he had his reward.' C.W.C. Miscellaneous MSS (uncatalogued), undated statement by W. Reader. The last sentence seems to refer to young Rollason's death. Coventry Standard, 20 January 1854.

August 1836 the Mercury was bought by a new company whose leading shareholder was William Wilmot. The paper's name was changed to the Coventry Standard. It was edited from the start by George Eld, the leading conservative of the city.(1) He wrote all the leading articles (now a prominent feature of the paper) from then until March 1852, when the 'local department' was taken over by the Standard's new reporter and sub-editor, Benjamin Poole, late of the Coventry Herald; no difference in approach is noticeable, since by the 1850s Poole, onetime member of the CPU, was as convinced a Tory as Eld, this being the underlying reason for his dismissal from the Herald. Eld continued to write the leaders on national and international affairs till November 1858, when he made way for Poole, who remained editor till his death in 1880.(2)

Eld set the tone of the Standard in his first leading article, which argued that the 'anti-Christian mongrels of destructive Whiggism in league with the Demonian Heresiarchs of Papal Rome' formed a conspiracy to demolish the constitution: 'usurpers whose polluted hands would tear the crown from the Monarch's brow'.(3) The Standard was a fiercely Tory paper, strong in defence of the Church of England and the Constitution, against 'infidels, anti-Protestant rebels, popish jacobins, hypocrites, traitors, assassins, fanatics and destructives, sworn enemies to the constitution in Church and State'.(4) To them were opposed

> that moral and political conservatism which has arisen almost spontaneously in England ... throwing around her time-hallowed institutions the protective mantle of preservation against the wild storm of levelling democracy which has howled over them ... within the pale of the British Constitution we have erected its lion standard ... under our banner have rallied the nobles - the clergy - the men of arms - the gentry - the independent yeomanry - the industrious tradesmen - and the operatives of this land of constituted freedom.(5)

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(1) Eld was a Foleshill corn miller who became a dyer in Coventry in 1840. He was the last mayor of the unreformed corporation and afterwards the doyen of the conservatives on the town council. He died in 1861, aged 70. C.W.C.: obituary of George Eld (newspaper cutting).

(2) Coventry Standard, 5 March 1852, 17 February 1854, 5 November 1858, 13 January 1860. C.W.C.: obituary of Benjamin Poole (newspaper cutting). On Poole and the Herald, see Section I of this chapter. Under Eld and Poole, the Standard's circulation grew. By 1859, it was over 1,000: Newspaper Press Directory (London, 1860), p. 136.

(3) Coventry Standard, 5 August 1836.

(4) ibid., 30 September 1836. See also ibid., 11 November, 18 November 1836, for similar opinions.

(5) ibid., 6 January 1837.

This constitution dated from the Act of Settlement, by which the Church of England became the permanent state religion of the British people, and the means to support it, such as church rates, became indefeasible parts of the constitution too:(1) he who menaced them would 'with as little compunction of conscience, tomorrow lend his hand to pull down the monarchy itself'.(2) Dissenters and Roman Catholics were equally a threat. The Standard regretted that Catholic Emancipation had been carried out but thought that the Roman Catholics ought to have shown due gratitude for it - instead of having 'the impudence to declare that they will "never rest" until they have converted England to their superstitions'.(3) Converts to Roman

(1) ibid., 27 January, 2 June 1837. See also ibid., 7 July 1837, for an attack on Lord John Russell for having apostatised from the principles of his ancestor 'that glorious Russell of a former age, who soaked his Protestant faith with his blood on the scaffold, denouncing the tyranny of Popery'.

(2) ibid., 14 July 1837. NB also Eld's bitter attack on J.T. Bannister over the church rates issue, ibid., 10 March 1837. The Standard's attacks brought a letter from 'Spon Street Dissenter', who argued that nearly one-half of his brethren in the city supported conservative candidates at elections. 'It is too much the fault of the Conservative press to include the whole body of the Dissenters, when speaking of the enemies of the establishment ... Hit as hard as you please the Radical portion of the Dissenters, but at the same time give the Conservative Dissenters credit for equal sincerity in wishing to uphold an Established Church, believing with Matthew Henry, Watts, Doddridge, & etc, that it is a barrier against Popery on the one hand, and infidelity on the other.' ibid., 23 March 1838. Eld's reply was 'We never include these conscientious men with those merely political Dissenters who, urged on by an equal hatred to the church and every other ancient institution, are reckless of the consequences which may ensue, provided that they gratify their destructive propensities'. ibid., 30 March 1838. But NB Eld's leading article of 3 December 1841: 'To conciliate the Dissenters (vain attempt) the land has been partly unchristianised by giving a sort of legal dispensation to their complaining sectaries to disregard the sacrament of baptism, - to celebrate merely civil marriages at a Union workhouse or a Registrar's Office, - and to bury their dead either with or without any ceremony, in any corner they may choose.'

(3) ibid., 4 January 1839. See also ibid., 18 April 1845. The Standard thought that the Maynooth Grant, distasteful though it was, was a corollary of Catholic Emancipation, and necessary to discipline Ireland. Daniel O'Connell was singled out for more abuse by the Standard than any other national politician in the 1830s and 1840s: 'that presumptuous bigot in religion, and hypocrite in morals - the common disturber of national decorum, who insulted English women with the pestiferous breath of his original calumny and falsehood'. ibid., 31 December 1836. In 1844 O'Connell came to speak in Coventry. The meeting was disrupted by men from the Operative Conservative Association; order was not restored till the police arrived and ejected them. The Standard contrasted O'Connell's popularity among 'conceited Cockneys' with the 'more sturdy' spirit in Coventry and resented the use of policemen to prevent Englishmen from exercising their right to disagree. ibid., 22 March 1844.

Catholicism - like Lord Fielding in 1850 - were attacked for 'flagrant dishonesty'(1), and the institution of Roman Catholic bishoprics in the same year was denounced as one of the many 'open and undisguised acts of defiance' for which Catholic Emancipation gave the first opening: the 'spurious liberality of modern times, and the delusions under which the Whigs were enabled to undermine all the safeguards against Papal encroachments, produced a false shame as to speaking about them which has tempted a degree of impertinence which is offensive and disgusting'.(2) The Church was menaced too by men like Joseph Hume - 'nearly a free thinker' - who wanted to open cathedrals to the public 'not for the purpose of worship, but as lounging places for the idler and the scoffer'.(3) The proposal to admit Jews to parliament was another sign of 'that indifference to sincerity, truth and of course to Christianity, which characterises the school of liberalism'.(4)

The Standard believed that the Church of England had a special, privileged educational function. While not seeking to deny that the other voluntary societies were entitled to state grants for their schools, after they began in 1833, it believed that the National Society should have special consideration: because it was the organ of the established church, whose doctrines were true. The dominant position which was to have been given to the Church by Graham's 1843 Factory Bill was only right and proper - and the dissenting opposition to it revealed a bitter persecuting hostility to truth and justice. It regretted that the educational provisions of the bill were abandoned.(5) When the fears aroused by this bill led dissenting voluntaryists to oppose the government scheme of 1846 for increased state grants to voluntary schools, the Standard

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(1) ibid., 6 September 1850.

(2) ibid., 25 October 1850. See also ibid., 8 November 1850, and 28 March, 18 April 1851 - approving the Titles' Assumption Bill and regretting that it lost its severity in its passage through parliament.

(3) ibid., 26 April 1844.

(4) ibid., 6 July 1849. Eld regarded it as unnecessary to read Hampden's works to have grounds for condemning strongly his appointment as bishop of Hereford: his exclusion from Oxford was proof enough of his unsatisfactory nature. ibid., 17 December 1847.

(5) ibid., 21 April, 5 May, 23 June 1843. NB also Eld's animosity towards Kay-Shuttleworth, the Secretary of the Committee of Council on Education, 1839-1849, for his policy of equal treatment of voluntary societies and of state inspection in return for grants - denounced by Eld as tampering with the Church of England. ibid., 26 October 1849.

accused them of being moved simply by envy: since under the grant regulations the greater the amount of private contribution the greater was the state subvention - which favoured the superior generosity of Anglicans.(1) But the Standard's most bitter attacks were directed towards those liberals who argued in the 1830s and 1840s that a school provision that would both accommodate doctrinal differences and be large enough to meet national needs would be best achieved by a national, state-financed system in which secular and doctrinal instruction were separated, all churches sharing in the latter on equal terms. Such a plan(2) was anathematised by Eld, for whom all instruction should rightly be informed by the truths of Christianity. It was produced by 'the political Papist - the Christ-denying Socinian - the "conscientious" Dissenter - the pretended churchman - and the callous freethinker', and would be met by the 'repugnance of every true churchman and every reflecting moralist, to this trashy scheme of philosophical instruction for the carter and the stable boy, the blacksmith and the navigator'.(3) Education 'without reference to the great leading truths of Revelation must ultimately lead to avowed and unblushing scepticism and infidelity'.(4) There were political dangers too:

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(1) ibid., 12 March, 30 April 1847. In its attacks on the 'fanatical voluntaries' the Standard agreed for once with the Herald.

(2) That of 1837, of the Central Education Society.

(3) ibid., 10 November 1837. See also ibid., 8 December, 22 December 1837 - in which the scheme is classed with the Poor Law Commissioners as a plot to 'overwhelm our liberties ... with a horde of venal placemen' exercising a centralising power in the interests of liberalism. See also ibid., 19 February 1841: 'It is not bigotry, on the part of churchmen, to insist that their children shall be trained in the principles, and instructed in the doctrines which they themselves believe to be true, and to have been preserved from an admixture of error, by the watchful and apostolic care of the episcopal guardians of the church. It is only another specimen of the arrogant intolerance of modern liberalism, to require that persons thus feeling and believing shall be compelled, under the pretence of promoting popular education, to confide the objects of their care to the professors of anythingarianism.'

(4) ibid., 16 October 1840. Eld was writing here in particular of the mechanics' institution, and the Owenite group that he regarded as the inevitable fruit of its secular instruction. For other attacks on 'the impious absurdities - the revolting blasphemies - of this set of political fanatics' and on the CMI that produced them, see ibid., 1 June, 15 June, 13 July 1838, 18 January, 25 January 1839.

> The masses of the people of all nations of whom we read, have never been subdued by purely moral cultivation ... they have been rendered, as the Athenians, discontented, and even miserable, in proportion as they become cultivated - dissatisfied with their kings and rulers ... A national education, divested of the restraining influence of the Christian religion, and that system of civil policy and moral obedience, which is contained in the word of God, would, in the end, prove a national curse, instead of a national blessing.(1)

In the 1830s and 1840s the Standard detested the Reform Bill and the Whig reforms that followed it - particularly the Municipal Corporations Act. It regretted that the Reform Bill had unsettled the 'balance of the constitution' by giving too much power to 'democracy' (by which in this context it meant the middle classes) over other classes. That it had not proved absolutely ruinous was the result of the innate conservative spirit and loyalty to their settled institutions of ordinary Englishmen.(2) It was glad that certain ancient, hallowed popular rights (in particular the freemen's franchise by servitude) - valuable in that they gave a limited and undominating representation to working-class interests - had been retained by the bill: an act of preservation for which the Standard rightly gave thanks to the efforts against the Whigs of another ancient institution it was anxious to defend, the House of Lords.(3) But the Standard did not wish this degree of working-class representation to be increased.

> We think it quite right that in many towns, for instance Coventry, Liverpool, Bristol, Norwich, Newcastle, Preston, York, Leicester, etc., etc., the poor but independent voters should predominate ... But as we would oppose the Franchise being confined to the higher classes, so we must also oppose Universal Suffrage, which would virtually place the representation in the hands of the lower orders; it would be manifestly unjust to every other interest in the state, who, for all practical purposes, might as well be disfranchised.(4)

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(1) ibid., 3 November 1837.
(2) Coventry Standard, 14 July 1848. See also ibid., 12 August, 11 November, 18 November 1836, 31 October 1845.
(3) ibid., 10 March 1837. The Standard was also in favour of abolishing the stamp duty on admission to the freedom: 5 May 1837. NB also the Standard's warning to the freemen that the Whigs were planning once more to disfranchise them, ibid., 10 September 1841.
(4) ibid., 5 January 1838. NB also ibid., 5 May 1837: 'We are not advocates for Universal Suffrage, which would place the whole power of electing members in the hands of the lower orders, but we do contend that all classes of the people ought to be represented in the Commons House of Parliament and consequently that the poorer class of voters in many towns ought to predominate, thereby enabling the working men to have their representatives in the Commons'. See also ibid., 24 November 1837 - an attack on the secret ballot.

In its condemnation of radicals the Standard included Chartists as well as those who stopped short of the Six Points. But it tended to denounce the former less severely: partly because the Chartists flayed the Whigs as much as, or more than, the Tories, and partly because of the strain in Chartism (including the movement in Coventry) which was sympathetic to the cause of protection and distrusted the free trade attitudes of middle-class radicals. Thus when Bell stood in Coventry in 1837 in opposition to Ellice and Williams the Standard reproved him for his belief in universal suffrage, but commended his alleged desire to restore the prohibition on the import of foreign ribbons, comparing his attitude with the lukewarmness of Williams, and even more so, Ellice; it commended Bell's 'excellent English' and his intellectual superiority to Williams.(1) When Feargus O'Connor came to Coventry in 1838 he praised Williams and attacked the Standard: but his equal disparagement of the Herald, and of Ellice as a 'lick-spittle' gave the Standard enough comfort to remark that the 'plain candour' of the Chartists was preferable to the insidious hypocritical radicalism of Daniel O'Connell and his like, that the Herald admired so much.(2) The rejection by many Coventry Chartists of the idea of corn law repeal in 1842 and 1843 was quoted with strong approval by the Standard,(3) while the disturbances of that summer - their Warwickshire manifestation being a turn-out of the miners in the north of the county - it regarded as originally fomented by the Anti-Corn Law

(1) ibid., 23 June, 7 July, 14 July 1837. In 1837 Eld attacked Ellice for his refusal to support the move to re-establish prohibition three years before: his admonition that 'Coventry was not the whole country' was constantly brought up. His frequent absences from Britain were held against him as proof of his neglect of his constituency. 'He is more often in Paris than Coventry.' ibid., 31 March 1837. 'He thinks as much of his constituents as of the Chippewas or the Cherokees.' ibid., 12 May 1837. See also 3 March 1837. With all his reservations Eld preferred Ellice to Williams: 'a political nondescript Whig, and a thoroughly contemptible Radical destructive, both alike chained to the filthy car of O'Connellite drudgery and humiliation' (ibid., 28 July 1837). Eld argued that the coalition between them was unnatural (ibid., 23 June, 14 July 1837). In the 1841 contest the Standard took the same line - while supporting Weir, the Tory protectionist candidate. ibid., 2 July, 9 July, 16 July 1841. In 1847 the Standard supported George J. Turner (though not enthusiastically - Turner was a Peelite) and his attempt to persuade Ellice's supporters to vote for him; again, the Standard spent most energy on abusing Williams - this time for his meanness in getting Ellice to pay his election expenses. ibid., 23 July, 30 July, 6 August 1847, 21 January 1848.

(2) ibid., 7 September, 14 September, 5 October 1838.

(3) ibid., 22 July 1842, 10 February, 17 February 1843. Linked with hostility to corn law repeal in many Chartists' minds in Coventry was dislike of another product of 'Manchester' - steam power. This hostility also commended them to the Standard at this time. See pp.486-7 below for further consideration of the Standard's attitudes on this topic.

League, as part of a revolutionary plot. The Chartists took advantage of the troubles thus factiously created. Eld was glad to think that the kindliness of mine-owners would alleviate the miners' real grievances over truck and wages that had given an opportunity to the trouble-makers, and that the good sense of Warwickshire working men would prevent their being duped by any revolutionary party - 'Complete Suffragists, Chartists, Leaguers, Radicals, and any other of the 1001 aliases under which they try to mystify the unwary'.(1) The decline of Chartism afterwards was welcomed: 'Socialism and Chartism were never very rampant here, but just now they are at a very low ebb'.(2) The paper thought Joseph Hume's 'Little Charter' of 1848 as bad as Chartism itself: the plan to give representation commensurate with their population to large towns would mean swamping the small boroughs and the agricultural districts, and was 'intended to place all classes, including the middle class, in a state of abject subserviency to the men of the Manchester school'(3) - who were led by Cobden, the 'foul-mouthed calumniator' of the farmers; Eld detested 'the rabid ravings of this political quack'.(4)

From its start, the Standard attacked the admission of foreign ribbons - 'the unfair and unnatural competition which the manufacturers have had to withstand from the foreign market'(5) - as the overriding cause of distress in the ribbon trade; the tariff was no real protection against this competition because of smuggling and false declarations of value by regular importers. To those who argued that 'free trade' in ribbons should be followed by the repeal of the corn laws the Standard replied that what they should strive

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(1) ibid., 2 September 1842. The Standard added that William Williams was a covert Chartist. See also ibid., 29 July, 19 August, 26 August 1842.

(2) ibid., 30 June 1843.

(3) ibid., 23 June 1848. Cf Eld's attack on the 'Leaguers', Cobden, Bright and Milner Gibson, some years later. Their plan to introduce equal electoral districts was intended to swamp small towns, and the interests they represented, by large cities such as Manchester, Liverpool and Leeds which were amenable to the control of cliques of Leaguers. 'The Counties of Lancaster and York are ... to predominate, and the rest of the country to be quiescent under their domination.' But 'the mere predominance of numbers has never yet been an element in our constitution'. ibid., 31 January, 25 July 1851. See also ibid., 1 February 1850 ('The Chartists of 1848 are the Financial Reformers of 1850') and 26 April 1850.

(4) ibid., 7 June 1844.

(5) ibid., 5 May 1837.

for was a protection for ribbons as strong as that enjoyed by agriculture. 'The real grievance is that all interests are not protected, and especially that in deference to fanciful and baseless theories, the particular interest of this district has been sacrificed.'(1) In April 1841 the Standard was still calling for the restoration of prohibition, many years after masters and weavers had ceased to do so, at least in an organised way. But in the same month it admitted that prohibition was not feasible. Henceforth, it concentrated on demanding that the tariff should be made more effective by the prevention of fraud and smuggling: which should be achieved, however, by transporting smugglers, not by lowering of the duty to remove the incentive, since this would merely increase lawful competition. Its constant complaint was that 'free trade' in ribbons had already led to abandonments of the list of prices and falls in earnings. Eld countered the campaign for repeal by arguing that the Anti-Corn Law League's motive was to be able to follow cheaper bread with lower wages.(2) Whether intended or not, lower wages would in any case be the result of repeal, for several reasons. The Leaguers argued that imports of foreign corn would be paid for by exports of British manufactured goods and that greater prosperity for the nation as a whole would follow. Eld replied that what they really meant was that exporting industries should benefit at the cost of those that relied on the home market - that Coventry was 'to be victimized for the sake of the cotton-spinners and calico-makers of Lancashire'(3) - since repeal would be followed by a great slump in farmers' earnings and purchasing power. But in addition the predicted rise in exports would not occur: foreign nations, as prudent guardians of their industries, would defend them against British competition - Eld instanced the protectionism of the United States as proof - in the

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(1) ibid., 28 August 1840.

(2) Bray said in May 1841 that 'It might be stated that their object in having the restrictions taken off the necessaries of life was to give less wages to the operatives. He admitted that was the case.' The Standard seized upon this typical gaffe by remarking: 'Mr. Bray's friends may call him indiscreet. We say he was candid. They all think as he spoke; but they have not the manliness to avow it.' ibid., 14 May 1841. Eld added: 'the Corn Law agitation has been got up by the Manchester Factory Lords, whose sympathy for the poor, in working little children till their growth is stunted, is notorious'.

(3) ibid., 11 February 1842.

same way that he counselled Britain to do against theirs.(1) Thus imports of grain would have to be paid for in gold: which would cause massive shortages of the capital and credit that the industrial system required. And in Coventry's special case this manifold ruin would be exacerbated by the ending of the ribbon tariff - which would of necessity speedily follow corn law repeal.

> Those who are connected with the silk trade - who have been the victims of this selfishness on the part of the cotton lords - who have been experimentalised upon for their benefit - and who have been exposed to an unfair competition with the French ribbon weaver, in the vain hope that our printed cottons might be forced upon France, need no lengthened arguments to convince them of the fallacy of these doctrines, which have only been successful in reducing their wages.(2)

The Standard regarded Peel's measures of 1846(3) as a betrayal of both the agricultural and industrial interests - in the latter's case, a victory for 'the doctrines of political economy, which teach in effect that the trade of Coventry, of Worcester, of Nottingham, and other places, ought to be sacrificed, in the hope of promoting that of Manchester'.(4) It denied Peel's argument that the encouragement given to fraud and smuggling by the high duties on ribbons should be removed by lowering them. The remedy was to enforce them more strictly. The prosperity of the ribbon trade had increased, Eld pointed out, since the tightening up of the Customs procedures several years before. Eld regretted that the

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(1) Eld did not think that the growth of trade and prosperity he noticed in the first five years of Peel's administration were due to his moves towards free trade. Eld gave the credit to a better tax system, the growth of railways, and the end of Whig foreign policy. ibid., 13 March 1846.

(2) ibid., 19 April 1844. Cf ibid., 8 December 1843: 'It is as great an abomination in the eyes of the Economists to regulate wages, as it is to exclude foreign corn or French ribbons, and yet the Operatives of this City know full well, that without such a regulation of wages as the list of prices effects, there would be no security for their receiving any remuneration for their labour, and that if a free trade in French ribbons was permitted, there would be little or no employment for them, at any wages'. This paragraph is based on the leading articles in the issues already cited and ibid., 3 March, 14 April, 21 April, 9 June, 7 July 1837, 1 March, 8 March, 20 September 1839, 5 June, 14 August, 18 December 1840, 26 February, 8 April, 16 April, 30 April, 21 May, 16 July, 6 August, 31 December 1841, 25 February, 15 July, 23 September, 30 September, 23 December 1842, 10 March, 28 July, 4 August, 8 September 1843, 29 March, 4 April, 8 November 1844, 10 January, 8 August 1845, 13 February, 27 February 1846.

(3) Besides drastically changing the Corn Laws, Peel halved the ribbon tariff.

(4) Coventry Standard, 20 March 1846.

ribbon trade did not protest much more at Peel's measures.(1) For some six years the Standard actively pressed for the restoration of 'full protection' to the industrial and agricultural interests jeopardised by 'free trade': described by Eld as an 'experiment' whose failure was fully apparent, the ills that agriculture, the ribbon trade and the economy periodically suffered from being ascribed to it, while any signs of prosperity were due to something else - for example, the influx of gold from California. The Standard praised the protectionist efforts of Disraeli and Edward Bulwer Lytton, and of the Warwickshire Society for the Protection of British Industry (in which William Wilmot and C.N. Newdegate took a salient part). But by 1852 Eld admitted that the 'experiment' could not be reversed, ceased calling for its end, and argued that the need in future was to prevent any further extension of it: for example, the reduction or abolition of the ribbon tariff.(2)

This change marked a significant shift away from the obsessions of the 1830s and 1840s. There was another - a diminution of religious rancour. The Standard hated still the idea of secular schools; they would encourage freethought.(3) Similarly, the leave given by the town council for a meeting to hear Holyoake to be held in St. Mary's Hall was evil because atheist opinions were demonstrably untrue; it was therefore quite wrong to support their dissemination. 'No-one can be deceived by the clap-trap about free discussion.'(4)

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(1) ibid., 30 January, 6 February, 13 February, 20 February, 27 February, 13 March, 20 March 1846. NB Eld's comments on Peel's motion to repeal the corn laws: 'How can they, [the Conservatives] at the bidding of any man, turn round upon themselves, and abandon the position they have heretofore maintained from the conviction of its justice and prosperity, without incurring a just imputation of the most degrading and abject servility?' ibid., 30 January 1846.

(2) ibid., 19 March, 5 November 1847, 24 March, 17 November 1848, 27 April, 23 November 1849, 4 January, 18 January, 10 May, 17 May 1850, 21 February, 2 May, 26 September 1851, 2 January, 5 March, 19 March, 16 April, 25 June, 20 August, 15 October, 3 December 1852. NB the very lukewarm obituary of Peel, and Eld's hostility to a memorial to him in Coventry because of corn law repeal. ibid., 5 July, 26 July 1850. The Standard did not cease grumbling about free trade after 1852. Eld argued that the Crimean War showed the folly of the Cobdenite argument that the growth of international trade would prevent war. Later, he maintained that free trade and the income-tax were cognate examples of Peel's folly, and that the latter was necessary, as a permanency, to pay for the former. Gold, not free trade, had caused the prosperity of the 1850s. ibid., 26 August 1853, 1 September 1854, 29 August 1856, 16 January 1857.

(3) Coventry Standard, 8 December 1854.

(4) ibid., 18 November 1853.

Mormonism meant 'the grovelling and profane dogmas of the most disgusting sect probably which has ever thrust itself before the public'.(1) As far as Protestant dissenters and Roman Catholics were concerned, the Standard was still opposed to their claim that church rates should be abolished (since the Anglican establishment had to be maintained), would not countenance Anglican involvement in the Coventry City Mission (a dissenting body) of the 1850s, and attacked the 1856 bill to abolish the oaths of abjuration and allegiance, which gave security against 'the encroachments of Rome and the approaches of Infidelity':(2) but after about 1852 there was no more of the vituperative abuse of earlier years, and the Standard's own disclaimer of bitterness was sincere. 'We can agree to differ, and ought to live in charity one towards another.'(3)

When in 1852 he recognised that free trade was irreversible Eld wrote that Conservative principles 'are of ... infinitely greater importance than the question of free trade'.(4) Thus the important question in British politics was 'whether the monarchical and mixed constitution shall succumb to democratical assaults'.(5) In a local context, this meant opposing changes in the representative system which would either disfranchise the freemen (as in Russell's 1854 bill) or swamp them with a mass of inferior electors. It was, Eld was prepared to admit in the 1850s, an 'anachronism' that freemen by inheritance, who were corrupt and unworthy fellows, should elsewhere enjoy the franchise: because this meant that Coventry freemen were by the ignorant classed with them. But Coventry freemen were not venal(6) - or at least far less so than £10 householders, and certainly far less so than those who would gain the vote by household suffrage. When educational franchises were discussed in 1859 the Standard argued that the freeman franchise was an educational one: the seven years that had been served to gain it were proof of talents, industry and respectability. Above all, if the freemen's franchise were either abolished

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(1) ibid., 12 June 1857.

(2) ibid., 5 March 1852, 28 March 1856, 19 February 1858.

(3) ibid., 29 January 1858.

(4) Coventry Standard, 30 July 1852.

(5) ibid., 25 June 1852.

(6) Eld disarmingly added that 'treating' was not bribery - merely the acceptance of an act of friendship. ibid., 30 June 1848.

or swamped their property and privileges would in time be swallowed by the general mass. 'What will it profit the Freemen if they gain all the "points" of a charter and lose their own franchise, their property and privileges ... The retention of their own honourable rights and privileges ought to be more to the freemen of the city than the carrying of any theory of reform.'(1) Democracy had, of course, wider dangers: the spoliation of property or the dictatorship which was its result in the France of Louis Napoleon. Plans for household suffrage the Standard called 'going "the whole hog" and laying the axe to the root of the British Constitution'.(2) It would approve, at most, the enfranchisement of some small groups of electors of proved common sense, honesty and good education (whom the Standard did not specify, except to say that they lived in the countryside) and a small measure of redistribution that did not carry with it the Standard's old fear - the domination of small towns and countryside by large cities. (3)

(1) Coventry Standard, 26 February 1858. See also ibid., 5 February 1858, when the Standard emphasised, in the same context, the danger of losing the Lammas land privileges. The Standard approved of public relief subscriptions and eleemosynary charities, thought the payments greatly assisted, not degraded, the poor, and above all wished the freemen to retain their charities. It thus was hostile to the Charity Commissioners' scheme of 1856; it criticised the Herald (and thus Charles Bray) for its approval of the scheme and its criticism of doles and charities. Coventry Standard, 2 March, 29 June, 28 December 1855, 4 January (the scheme was 'progeny of that chameleon Reform') 11 January, 18 January, 11 April, 18 April, 14 November 1856. NB in particular ibid., 20 March 1856: 'The poor have a right in these benefactions, of which they cannot be deprived, without shaking the security of all other kinds of property'. See also the Standard's attack on those non-freemen who tried to get the freemen's privilege of a free education for their sons at the Free Grammar School (ibid., 24 February 1854) and its denunciation of the Council's attitude to freemen's rights over the Gosford Green affair (ibid., 4 June 1858). Editorially, the Standard said very little about the enclosure of the Lammas lands: but Eld owned some of them.

(2) ibid., 18 March 1859.

(3) See, besides the sources cited, ibid., 10 October 1851, 13 February, 20 February 1852, 4 March, 11 November 1853, 24 February 1854, 7 August 1857, 3 December 1858, 4 February, 11 March 1859, 9 March 1860. The Standard pressed for the abolition of the malt tax to relieve the farming interest. ibid., 17 December 1852, 22 April 1853. One aspect of the decline in the Standard's rancour in the 1850s was the dropping of its old abuse of the liberal M.P.s for the city. It continued to support Conservative candidates and advised Tory voters not to support liberals with their second vote - asking for plumpers for Phillimore in 1857 and Thomas in 1859. It also tried, however, to induce Ellice's supporters to give their second votes to Phillimore and Thomas, and to get the Old Blues to support Hubbard at the 1854 bye-election. The coalitions between Ellice and Geach or Paxton it attacked as unnatural. But even

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A similar fear lest Coventry should be overriden by external authority was mixed with regard for the ratepaying interest in the Standard's attitude to the crucial question of local government. It welcomed the public health act of 1848 for granting to the locality 'compulsory powers ... over reluctant and niggardly proprietors and occupiers': its danger was that it also created a General Board of Health with cognate powers over this locality - powers which might be used to force upon it expenses beyond local means.(1) Thereafter the Standard mingled attacks on Coventry's filth and approval for the idea of cleansing it, with opposition to the scheme proposed by the General Board of Health's inspector, William Ranger, since it involved a scheme of sewerage allegedly both too expensive and inefficacious; the Standard preferred brick sewers to Ranger's plan of tubular earthenware ones. It accused the General Board of a deceitful and arrogant attempt to force its plans on Coventry. 'The contest is not between filth and purity, but between an efficient system of drainage and purification, and the "Empirical Standard" or peculiarly Chadwickian system promulgated by the Board.'(2) On the other hand, the desire of Cobden, Bright and their associates to effect economies in national expenditure by cutting the cost of the army and navy was yet another ground that the Standard had to dislike them(3) - as was their pacifism. Strong armed forces were needed to defend Britain against internal revolution and foreign enemies, France being feared in the early

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(3) cont.
Geach (whose return in 1851 it regarded as disgraceful) called forth no greater insult than that his bust deserved a place in the Crystal Palace because he was such a bad speaker. In 1857 it praised Ellice's many qualities and Paxton's 'amiable and generous' character; it merely disliked them as M.P.s. ibid., 11 April, 23 May 1851, 2 July, 9 July 1852, 8 December 1854, 13 March, 20 March, 27 March, 3 April 1857, 15 April, 29 April, 6 May, 13 May 1859.

(1) ibid., 15 September 1848. See also ibid., 11 August 1848.

(2) Coventry Standard, 14 July 1854. See also (in particular) ibid., 29 June, 13 July, 20 July, 10 August, 28 September, 30 November 1849, 5 April, 3 May 1850, 28 November, 12 December 1851, 9 January, 16 January, 13 February, 20 February, 18 June, 27 August, 10 September, 1 October 1852, 28 January, 11 March, 8 July 1853, 12 October 1855. A main sewer of brick was eventually built, to the Standard's gratification. In all the points at issue the Standard was at loggerheads with the Herald. See also the Standard's attack on the 'centralising' Police Bill of 1856. It offended the idea of local autonomy as embodied in the Municipal Corporations Act (though, said the Standard, it had no brief for that either) since it threatened to remove from the city the decisions on the size and nature of the police force that it could afford and best suited it. The Times's approval of the bill the Standard described as 'Cockney conceit and complacency'. ibid., 29 February, 14 March 1856.

(3) Another was their plan to abolish the newspaper duty, which Eld described as a move 'to lower English newspapers to the American

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1850s and Russia later. The Standard approved heartily of the Crimean War: it was glad that the opportunity to crack the Russian aggressor came when it did; had it been delayed she might have grown too powerful. It regarded the inadequacies of the British military administration revealed by the war as the malignant result of the economy campaigns of the Cobdenites, ridiculed their pleas for peace during the war, and regretted that peace was signed in 1856 before Britain had crushed Russia totally.(1)

Eld wrote in April 1855:

> Manchester divides its attention between two pet objects. On one side it seeks to establish for the Russian czars the right to burn, slay, and ravage at their hot pleasure in any European territory east of the Rhine; on the other it seeks to earn for the Lancashire cotton czars a similar right to tear, grind and pulverise the limbs of Queen Victoria's lieges.(2)

The Standard favoured factory legislation throughout the period. 'Perfectly disgusting it is' (wrote Eld in 1842) 'that ... any man should be found willing to permit the most barbarous and bestial treatment of helpless women and children, rather than interfere with the price of labour'.(3) The Standard wished to protect adult males by statute too - welcoming the 1847 Ten Hours' Bill for (it believed) doing this as well as protecting women and children. The journal later regretted that the Lancashire mill-owners were able to circumvent restrictions on the hours of men by the relay system, and welcomed the 1853 bill which remedied the position.(4)

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(3) cont.
standard' and to stifle all criticism of themselves. ibid., 23 March 1855.

(1) ibid., 18 August, 29 December 1848, 2 November 1849, 25 April 1851, 13 February 1852, 26 January, 2 February, 3 August, 21 September 1855, 2 May 1856. Eld's attitude to the Crimean War was thus significantly different from Bray's in the Herald. So were their views on the Indian Mutiny: for Eld's abrasive toughness see Coventry Standard, 11 September 1857; he was glad that 'Hindoo assassins and ravishers were being blown from the mouths of cannons' and he described Bray's protest in the Herald as a 'maudlin affectation of sentiment'. He also described as 'maudlin sentimentality' Bray's plan to reform criminals in model prisons, and asked for more sympathy for the poor, treated worse than criminals. Eld favoured transportation - sweeping aside the objections of Australians as a disgraceful attempt to snatch the whole island which they owed to Britain anyway. ibid., 23 May 1851. See also ibid., 12 February 1847, which, typically, argued that the free traders also now 'involved in a similar speculative haze the subjects of prison discipline and secondary punishments'.
(2) Coventry Standard, 27 April 1855: 'The Limb-Breakers' League'. Cobden and Bright were linked together for attack.
(3) ibid., 22 July 1842.
(4) ibid., 12 February, 7 May 1847, 22 March 1850, 30 March 1855.

In the distressful early 1840s Eld saw the chronic unemployment from which the weaving area suffered as caused by the foreign competition allowed by 'free trade' but aggravated by the growth of steam looms, producing 'treble the quantity of goods they did fifteen or twenty years ago. Hence arises a glut of goods, and dire distress among the industrious operatives.'(1) In Manchester (free of course from the competition of foreign cottons) it was machinery, said Eld, not the corn laws that the Manchester millowners disliked so much, that caused the distress.(2) Just as he pressed for 'full protection' against the foreigner, so he also recommended the protection of industry against 'improvements to machinery, or any other cause that interrupts its operation':(3) a tax on 'machinery which supersedes manual labour'. He wished not to stop permanent 'improvement' but to shield men from its 'immediate effects'.(4) But these plans were not developed in concrete detail, and indeed apparently vanished, with the end of the slump of the early 1840s, as quickly as the Chartist group ideologically so similar. Thenceforth, the Standard remained editorially silent on the growth of steam power in the ribbon trade until the factory boom of the mid-1850s: when it opened its correspondence columns to Richard Hartopp to enable him to reply at length to Charles Bray's current argument that it was the factory operatives who were bad, not the factory system - an act for which the committee of the Factory Operatives' Association gave the paper its thanks;(5) and when it several times attacked the neglect that the children of

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(1) ibid., 21 May 1841.

(2) ibid., 15 July 1842.

(3) ibid., 25 February 1842 - a leading article which explicitly links the protection of agriculture and industry against foreign competition with the idea of taxing machinery, and goes on to denounce the 'Manchester Manufacturers' who were leading the agitation for Corn Law repeal while 'resisting all the benevolent efforts of Lord Ashley to ameliorate the condition of the operatives in their own employ'.

(4) ibid., 17 February 1843. Eld went on to denounce 'the trickery of the Leaguers, who attribute every evil to the Corn Laws, and none to the inventions that substitute the child for the adult', and 'the theories of the Economists, who look only to the amount of capital employed, and not the quantum of human happiness produced, for evidence of the prosperity of a trade'. He commended the exactly similar arguments which Mason, the Coventry Chartist, was advancing at this time. On this point, see also Chapter Seven, Section III.

(5) ibid., 4 May, 11 May, 18 May 1855.

factory operatives suffered.(1) But these references are brief and cryptic (since the Standard would use any stick to beat Charles Bray and in the other case it seems to be attacking the parents of neglected children rather than the factory system) and do not amount to an indictment of the growth of steam power. Nor, of course, did the weavers mount one, consistently and determinedly, till 1858. When they did, the Standard attacked them.

From its foundation onwards the Standard desired, from masters, a paternalist care for weavers in their employ. From weavers it expected a patient trust in those set over them: quiescence, gratitude for charity, peaceful agitation for the amelioration of the given system, moderate and prudent pressure for higher wages or the list of prices. It liked above all to record celebrations of amity between employers and employed. It took 'great pleasure in reporting an instance of harmony between manufacturers and employees': a meeting at J. & C. Ratliffs' factory, for the operatives to present to Cleophas Ratliff a silver cup because he had given them additional time for breakfast. Dancing, quoit-playing and jingle-racing followed the speeches.(2) And when weavers were in distress, the Standard supported public subscriptions for their relief, and praised their patience.(3)

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(1) ibid., 19 October 1855 - 'A case which painfully illustrates the risks to which the children of poor factory operatives are exposed'. Two parents left for the factory, leaving a child of three in the care of his brother, aged six. As the elder dressed the younger and they sang their morning hymn together the elder's clothes caught fire from the grate and he burned to death. Neighbours could not reach them because the door was locked. See also ibid., 6 February 1857, a leading article blaming high infant mortality in the city on the factory system. 'The children of this city are evidently much mismanaged.'

(2) ibid., 25 July 1851. The year before the Standard had reprimanded the Ratliffs' factory weavers for striking over the meal-break issue: they should have trusted their employer to do his best for them, and if they found conditions not to their liking, gone to another. ibid., 25 October 1850. See also ibid., 16 August 1839, a rhapsodical report of the proceedings at the opening of a new smelting furnace at George Whieldon's Hawkesbury ironworks. 'The rich and the poor, he observed, were inseparably linked together, and were wisely ordained to be dependent on each other, so that neither could say to the other "I have no need of thee". Loud cheers. At the conclusion of his address, Mr. Whieldon ordered his agent to distribute amongst his workmen a quart of ale to each, whilst his immediate friends were regaled with sparkling champagne ... We are happy to say that the great body of the inhabitants of Bedworth and its vicinity, are sound at heart, and thoroughly despise the wild and wicked schemes of the chartists.'

(3) ibid., 24 December 1841, 2 March 1855. See also ibid., 9 March on this latter fund. 'Light sorrows speak - great grief is dumb. The Irish poor ... by their clamorous importunity, they have found best of all, while hundreds of our native poor have been excluded from all benefit'.

It was Eld's belief that in an industry so overstocked with labour the list was in the best interests of masters and men. An abandonment of the list (he wrote during the slump and dispute of 1840) would not increase the sale of a luxury item like ribbons, though they might cost a little less; it would lead to internecine competition among manufacturers; it would impoverish both the weavers and the shopkeepers who relied on their purchasing power. He hoped that a town meeting would succeed in re-establishing the list 'and that a restoration will take place of that harmony and good feeling which it is so desirable should ever prevail between the employers and the employed'.(1) The Standard praised the cautious and non-violent nature of the agitation for the reimposition of the list that followed - congratulated the weavers as a whole for the respect they showed to their employers - was glad that for the most part they avoided Chartist entanglements.(2) The attempt of Spencer and Horsfall to reduce the wages of their factory hands in 1854(3) was an inhuman act: honourable masters would not wish to compel their employees to a diet worse than a convict's.(4) The paper was strongly critical of James Hart's attempted abandonment of the list in the same year, and backed the weavers' pressure - which was peaceful - to compel him to adhere to it.(5) It disapproved of the refusal by Messrs. Spencer and Horsfall in 1856 to pay the extra 1s. per week demanded by their factory hands, sympathised with them in the lock-out that followed, and while condemning a man who cut the warps out of his loom before leaving, denounced far more strongly - as a 'starvation screw', an 'un-English and cruel system of revenge' - Spencer and Horsfall's circulation throughout the city of the names of their employees, in an attempt to deny them work elsewhere.(6) The Standard supported the weavers in their struggle over the price for winding sewings in 1857 - it was unfair, it said, to expect men to wind for nothing - and in the long battle with

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(1) ibid., 7 August 1840. See also ibid., 5 June, 14 August 1840. See also ibid., 10 March, 17 March 1837 - attacks on masters who make unfair stoppages from payments to weavers.

(2) ibid., 18 November, 25 November 1842. The weavers thanked the Standard, in return, for its 'faithful reports' of their meetings during the strike.

(3) These were weekly wages, not payments for piece-work.

(4) ibid., 3 February, 10 February 1854.

(5) ibid., 9 June 1854.

(6) ibid., 24 October 1856.

Messrs. Smith over the outdoor list of prices in the following year. It commended their patience and warned Messrs. Smith that they would be to blame if the weavers were to lose it.(1) This was in August 1858.

One month later there was an entire volte-face: the Standard withdrew from the weavers the support it had given them for twenty years. In the crucial strike of 1858 the weavers proposed essentially not to do well for themselves within the existing system, but to prevent that system from developing in the way capital thought most efficient. To the Standard this aim (however peaceful the tactics used) was to depart from the weavers' true function in society and, in addition, to be guilty of economic folly. The weavers' handbill attempting to justify their demand for piece-work payments in all factories was 'twaddle'.(2) In an obvious attack on the outdoor first-hands who were such a strong force behind the strike, and in an attempt to divide the journeymen and factory weavers from them, the Standard said that the weavers should chiefly fear 'the speculator without capital - the journeyman master - the manufacturer from hand to mouth, who is foremost to slip down wages, and to resort to all manner of petty exactions and oppressions towards the weaver'.(3) The outdoor first-hands paid their turning-boys and the majority of their weavers weekly wages: the factory hands could not force them to pay by the piece. Thus if they were successful the strikers would impose a great penalty on the factory masters with the most advanced machinery: they would be competing with outdoor first-hands who, owing to their paying weekly wages, would have lower production costs, and with the less advanced factory masters whose inferior looms would be no disadvantage to them because they would be paying by the piece.(4) The 'Bunch of Six' would not profit from the superior productivity of their looms. Yet the weavers must understand that their own best interests would be served by allowing the most go-ahead manufacturers to make the most fruitful use of their capital. In the

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(1) ibid., 15 May 1857, 13 August 1858.

(2) Coventry Standard, 3 September 1858. The Standard added, however, that the document was so unlike the usual 'plain, common sense' of the committee that somebody else must have written it.

(3) loc. cit.

(4) ibid., 3 September, 10 September 1858.

previous few years a free run for capital had replaced an old factory in Agnes Lane with a new and capacious one at St. John's Bridge, which paid higher wages. 'Would they like to see the new factory turned into desolation, and resume work on the old terms at the old factory with the old machinery? ... Capital and labour must be combined, or else no good can come of either.'(1) The overriding danger was that the trade would leave the city: if successful, the weavers would 'sow the seeds of mischief for some future and not distant day'.(2) To prevent the mischief, the Standard recommended the weavers to go back on the masters' terms.(3) When they did not, the Standard reflected that their apparent victory was hollow; a total imposition of piece-work on the factory trade was impracticable because, it alleged, so many weavers wished to be paid by weekly wages. Thus the list price and weekly wages must coexist: certainly it was quite wrong that workers should seek to dictate to employers the way in which they should run their businesses, and wicked that they should use violence in the attempt (as in May and June 1859).(4) Thus by 1859 the Standard was displaying no sympathy for or understanding of the weavers' cause; the arguments they advanced for the overriding necessity for the list were ignored rather than countered. The difference in attitude between the liberal and Tory newspapers in the crisis years of 1858 and 1859 was that the Herald at least met the weavers' arguments with an attempt at full, detailed, rational refutation: the Herald treated them as misguided men, the Standard as delinquent children.

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(1) ibid., 3 September 1858. The Victoria factory was at St. John's Bridge.

(2) ibid., 10 September 1858. See also ibid., 1 October 1858: a long statement by the disgruntled wife of a factory lock-out. The Standard commented that factories were not ideal work-places and that their masters earned high profits. But these were necessary for the creation of capital. As to wages: 'We know it is all little enough, and should be glad to see it more; but still, we must deal with things as they come positively before us'.

(3) ibid., 1 October 1858. When he attended a weavers' meeting in St. Mary's Hall Benjamin Poole, the reporter and sub-editor of the Standard, was criticised strongly by Read of the outdoor trade for his paper's attitude during the strike. ibid., 22 October 1858.

(4) ibid., 31 December 1858, 10 June 1859. The Herald, too, asserted that many weavers wished to have weekly wages: but as I have attempted to show in Chapter Six, Section IV, the difficulty that Hart had in acquiring blacklegs in the summer of 1859 - and the opposition they met from the striking weavers and their supporters - demonstrated that the newspapers were guilty of wishful thinking on this point.

III

The Coventry Times and the Coventry Free Press

The removal of the newspaper stamp duty in 1855 led to the publication of the first penny newspaper in the city in the same year. This was the Coventry Times; its name was changed to the Coventry Weekly Times at the end of the year. Its proprietor was Edward Goode. Twenty years before he had been a first-hand weaver and a weavers' leader; by the 1840s he had set up as a bookseller and stationer in Smithford Street. From the 1830s onwards he had been active in radical politics - for franchise extension and corn law repeal, notably - and in the dissenting movement against church and vicar's rates.(1) Under his proprietorship the Times prospered, though it offered less news than its two competitors, and shorter leader columns. In its first year its circulation was about equal, at 2000, to those of its competitors combined; by 1859 it had risen to 5000, while the Herald and the Standard each had circulations of over 1000.(2)

The Times was a radical and nonconformist journal. It was against aristocratic privilege, such as the purchase of army commissions and the acquisition of official posts through patronage; it wished to see competitive recruitment for the civil service. It pressed for reductions in taxation and lighter taxes on earned than unearned income. It distrusted the 'centralisation' of government and believed that localities should be subject to the

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(1) Coventry Times, 29 June 1855. Lascelles and Co, Directory and Gazetteer of the City of Coventry (Coventry, 1850), p. 44. For Goode's involvement in political and industrial movements in the city, see Chapters Three, Six and Seven.

(2) Newspaper Press Directory (London, 1860), p. 136.

interference of central government only in cases of the gross negligence of their duties. One of the chief among these, the Times claimed, was the maintenance of a low rate-burden. It urged on the local board of health in Coventry the need to be frugal, prudent and not excessively ambitious in its sewering and watering of the city. In the crucial question that excited the city for so long in 1858 and 1859 - whether the salary of Greatorex, the surveyor, should be raised by £50 a year, the Times strongly said 'No'.(1)

The Times lent its support to the Liberation Society, and pressed for the abolition of church rates and the disendowment of the Church of Ireland. Like Charles Bray's Herald, it urged on its readers the sovereign value of education, whose extension would, argued the Times, lead to a diminution of crime and the inculcation of habits of industry; it was the ignorant who were lazy, said Goode. But unlike the Herald it supported the voluntaryist cause in elementary education and was suspicious of State intervention.(2) It was reluctant too for the ignorant poor to be enfranchised; its radicalism did not go so far. The Times called in 1857 for the extension of the suffrage to those who had 'intelligence and culture in the humblest classes, ascertained by the application of moderate and reasonable tests'. Goode had in mind the grant of the franchise to £5 householders, lodgers who paid income tax, and depositors in savings banks.(3) The ballot was needed too.(4) At the same time, members of the working class who had the franchise were advised to prove themselves worthy of it by refusing to accept bribes or treating.(5) The reform bill of 1859 the Times repudiated as a measure of 'ingenuity, amplitude, illusion' which did not go nearly far enough. 'The people have

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(1) Coventry Times, 29 June, 31 October 1855. Coventry Weekly Times, 21 May, 19 November, 31 December 1856, 17 June, 26 August, 28 October 1857, 16 November 1859, 31 October 1860. In its attitude towards civic economy the Times was sharply different from Charles Bray's Herald.

(2) Coventry Weekly Times, 16 April, 25 June, 20 August, 27 August, 8 October 1856, 7 January, 29 April, 10 June 1857, 5 May 1858. Goode opposed capital punishment and merely punitive imprisonment. He wished the penal system to encourage the reform of criminals. ibid., 18 June, 24 December 1856.

(3) ibid., 22 April 1857. Goode added that the increased representation for large towns, though necessary, would have to be effected in such a way that that for small towns was not swept away in the process.

(4) ibid., 15 July 1857. See also 16 July 1856, 17 February 1858.

(5) ibid., 14 October 1857.

waited with lengthened and exemplary patience. Cheap literature, educational institutions, popular lectures have diffused an amount of enlightenment among them which at no previous era in our history they possessed.'(1) The franchise ought greatly to be extended, though the Times regretted that so few in Coventry pressed this demand.(2) The Times was now much less specific in the details of the extension it wanted than it had been two years before: but revealed once more the essentially moderate nature of its radicalism in its frequent expression of the opinion that John Bright, though the Times admired him, was too hasty in his plans for household suffrage. He wished to enfranchise too many, too quickly. The Times preferred Cobden's gradualism.(3)

Near the conclusion of the Coventry weavers' dispute with the thrusting factory masters the Times stressed the essential moderation of the artisan class.

> The English workman is neither a reckless vagabond, nor a hairbrained fool. He does not want to upset those institutions under which he has been nurtured, and by means of which he is the freest artizan in the world. He would decline on any consideration to swallow the aristocracy. He has no desire to pick the pockets of the opulent ... He wishes to live by labour ... He is, moreover, English, patriotic, loyal, to the backbone.(4)

Throughout this long dispute it was the Times's contention that the weavers' insistence on ending weekly wages in factories was moderate, rational, and reasonable: the only means by which they could prevent the factory - denounced by the Times as exerting immoral influences on weavers - from dominating and crushing the outwork system in which so much capital had been invested. Piece-work had advantages for those in factories too. Paying for labour on very large power looms by weekly wages was potentially very profitable to employers: but only if they maintained rigorous factory discipline that injured

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(1) ibid., 2 March 1859.

(2) ibid., 9 February 1859.

(3) ibid., 29 December 1858, 23 March, 24 August, 14 September, 14 December 1859. The Times liked Paxton more than Ellice as a local representative - favouring Paxton's condemnation of the British action in Canton in 1857 and his greater force on the franchise question. But it advised Coventry electors to vote for both lest a Tory should be let in. In any case, there was room for difference: 'in the Senate, above all other places, the prudent and cautious counsels of age should temper the impetuous and fiery ardour of youth'. ibid., 13 April 1859. See also 4 March, 11 March, 18 March, 1 April 1857, 20 April 1859.

(4) ibid., 30 March 1859.

the weavers' health and offended their dignity. Piece-work

> renders unnecessary in a large measure that locking in and locking out, that watching and whipping to keep all in motion which is attendant upon the weekly system, so obnoxious to the honest and industrious workman, and beneficial only to the unprincipled and lazy ... We have yet to hear that a thing is always better because it is larger. A machine may become injurious as well as useful ... and ... Mr. Hart's improved looms ... are so large that they tax a man's power to that degree that he has become giddy and almost senseless while working at them ... We say tell us not of England's greatness if the large figures of her exports and imports are to be the result of premature age, misery, and debility forced upon the industrious, but over-taxed and ill-paid artizans and mechanics.(1)

The Times argued that defeat for the weavers would mean lower takings for shopkeepers and ruin for the entire town: since the consolidation of weekly wages in factories would be followed by the erosion of the outwork list of prices as the large factory became more and more profitable and competitive. But, it added, the slightly increased prices for ribbon that might follow the institution of piece-work in factories would not drive the trade away from Coventry to towns of cheaper production, since (here the Times was advancing an argument used throughout the century) the sale of ribbons was regulated by fashion, not price.

> However beautiful in theory may be the doctrine of political economy, however true or extensive in its application, we deny that the consumption of ribbon is regulated by its cost, and in proof of this we will only refer him to his(2) neighbours, and they will tell him that last week they cleared out their stocks of fast peach colour at 2s. per piece higher in price than articles of the same quality, width and name, also as fully adapted to the season of the year.(3)

But the price of continuing to enjoy that support from the city which the weavers had and which the Times argued for was an entire absence of violence or breaches of the law - no matter how despicable the object of their wrath. The Times cautioned against any further violence to Satin Jack and the other blacklegs:

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(1) ibid., 8 June 1859. See also ibid., 1 April 1857 - praise of Cash's Kingfield cottage factories as 'combining all the advantages of the factory with the comfort of the private house and the domestic hearth', and 6 October 1858.

(2) That is, Charles Bray's. The Times was replying in all its leading articles to the line of argument taken by the Coventry Herald.

(3) Coventry Weekly Times, 15 June 1859. See also ibid., 9 June, 11 August, 15 September, 22 September, 29 September, 20 October 1858, 22 June, 13 July 1859, for other leading articles arguing that the gaining of piece-work in factories was essential for weavers and the city.

> We hope that the weavers will abstain from anything like violence towards those who become so reckless of consequences as to break down the only barrier against their own and their neighbours' ruin. The law allows them thus to act, and those who gain by their conduct will prosecute in defence of their own selfish ends, and if the charge is proved and the case pressed, the magistrates are bound to act.(1)

During the dispute the support the Times gave to the weavers was reinforced by another cheap radical newspaper, the Coventry Free Press, started in October 1858 by W.F. Taunton.(2) He commended the weavers' efforts to establish piece-work in factories as the only means of creating satisfactory conditions of labour in both the factory and outdoor branches, and a genuine harmony between masters and men.

> Unlimited competition is a social evil and a commercial crime ... The bold, active, and enterprising spirits of the commercial world too often ignore the man, and only remember the busy bee of labour. This feeling produces antagonism, and an isolation that is anything but productive of that reciprocity of feeling, which is the best security of the rights of labour and the reward of capital.(3)

Economically, the weavers' cause was the city's - an attempt to prevent the ruin of shopkeepers. Morally, it was aimed at preventing 'the social and domestic ties of home and labour (being) separated for ever'.(4)

In its political attitudes the Free Press was more radical than the Times. It called for manhood suffrage as both a political right and as a means of enhancing the moral sense of the people.

> Those who are everlastingly defending injustice under the plea of fear, have but little faith in right. Public life appeals to the highest and noblest, as well as the meanest and basest, principles of human nature ... By giving the people opportunities of acting and voting on the vast and permanent interests of their native land a mental intelligence is created, and a moral responsibility is awakened, which the political slave and the social serf has but a small conception of ... Reason, right, and public justice demand an increase of power for the intelligent and industrious classes of this country.(5)

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(1) ibid., 11 May 1859. See also ibid., 25 August 1858, 25 May, 1 June, 29 June, 1859, for other admonitions against violence. NB that in the spring of 1859 the Times argued that the violence of some weavers, though regrettable, was in response to Hart's disrespect for established convention in breaking his promise to pay by weekly wages.
(2) He was the son of the veteran radical William Taunton. I am grateful to W.F. Taunton's great-grandson, John Marston of Coventry City Football Club, for this information. W.F. Taunton was later the editor of the Labourers Union Chronicle.
(3) Coventry Free Press, 10 June 1859.
(4) ibid., 8 October 1858. See also ibid., 1 October, 15 October, 29 October 1858.
(5) ibid., 2 March 1860. See also ibid., 4 March 1859, attacking the conservative reform bill as a 'meagre, miserable measure ... subterfuge, deceit, pretence, double-dealing, hollow specious pretences', and 25 March, 1 April, 8 April 1859 - pleas for manhood suffrage.

But like the Times (and for that matter the Herald) it asked all radicals to vote for both Ellice and Paxton, 'honest, faithful and consistent reformers all their lives'.(1)

The record of the weavers' struggle in 1858 and 1859 shows that they had enjoyed in large measure the civic support for which the Times and Free Press argued. In 1860 the Cobden-Chevalier treaty surprised the city. The Times supported it, and the Free Press attacked it - like most people in the city. The attitude of the majority was shrewd. The passage of the treaty precipitated a great slump and, concurrently, the withdrawal of the backing that the city and most masters had given to the weavers' cause - a sad process that culminated in the abandonment of the list of prices in July 1860. The weavers struck. The Times and the Free Press, now alone in the city, fought vainly for the restoration of the old system of paternalist regard.

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(1) ibid., 22 April 1859. See also 29 April 1859. One significant difference between the Free Press and the Times was that the Free Press supported the plan to pay the city surveyor, Greatorex, an extra £50 a year: it was wise to spend money liberally to make the city cleaner. Coventry Free Press, 28 October 1859.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE DISASTER OF 1860 AND THE COLLAPSE OF THE LIST OF PRICES

I

The Anglo-French Treaty of Commerce, 1860

A few months after the ribbon weavers had ended their fifteen-month battle with the thrusting masters with victory in July 1859, Richard Cobden began the confidential discussions in Paris which resulted in the commercial treaty between France and Britain. The treaty, signed on 23 January 1860, was in the event valued greatly by both governments: because it promised both commercial and political advantage - increased trade and diplomatic rapprochement. By the treaty Britain promised to reduce drastically the imposts on French wines and spirits, with full effect from 1 April 1861. The import duties on almost all other French goods were to be abolished with effect from the approval of the treaty by parliament - with the reservation to the British government of the right to retain for two years half the import duty where its immediate abolition would create hardship for native industry. There was, however, one significant exception to this power of postponement: the import duties on silk goods were to be removed entirely as soon as the treaty received parliamentary approval. In return, France agreed to abolish, in respect of British products, the prohibitions on foreign goods which had for long shielded French manufacturers from external competition; these prohibitions were many and included iron, cotton cloth and many silk goods. The prohibitions were to be lifted by 1 October 1861, and were to be replaced by protective tariffs that were not to exceed thirty per cent; after another three years the permitted maximum was to be

reduced to twenty-five per cent.(1)

The provisions of the treaty were incorporated in the budget proposals for 1860-1861, which Gladstone (then Chancellor of the Exchequer) revealed on 10 February. He explained that expenditure and taxation had to remain high. He admitted that it might be argued that this was an inopportune moment to reduce the revenue from customs duties, or that if concessions were possible a reduction in the tea and sugar duties that pressed heavily on the poor should be the first. To this he preferred, however, the abolition of the import duties on several hundred manufactured goods - an act which would both raise the standard of living and remove from native industry a protection that hindered and cramped its energetic development. Thus Gladstone applied the lesson he saw in the history of the previous twenty years - that free trade so greatly increased prosperity that the nation was better able to pay high taxation. The fact that the duties acted as protective tariffs for British industry, therefore, made Gladstone dislike them. Article XIV of the treaty permitted Britain to retain half the present duty for up to two years in cases where hardship would be caused to native industry. Gladstone made use of it only for the glove-making and straw-plaiting trades 'carried on almost entirely by widely diffused rural labour, to which it is not desirable to give a sudden shock'.(2) On all other manufactured goods the duties were to be immediately abolished, any further grant of the protection they provided being regarded by Gladstone as an unacceptable privilege. He specifically mentioned and rejected the claims for special treatment of the silk trade that had already been made to him by Spitalfields and Coventry - claims that were in fact ruled out by Article XIV, which excluded the silk trade from the postponing powers to be enjoyed by the British government. Nor were the industries affected to face competition from France only. Gladstone met the arguments that a bipartisan treaty of commerce was an abrogation of true free trade principles

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(1) P.P.: [2607] H.C. (1860) lxviii: Treaty of Commerce between Her Majesty and the Emperor of the French. A.L. Dunham, The Anglo-French Treaty of Commerce of 1860 and the Progress of the Industrial Revolution in France (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1930), pp. 64 et seq. See also A.A. Iliasu, 'The Cobden-Chevalier Commercial Treaty of 1860', Historical Journal, xiv (1971), pp. 67 et seq, which relates the negotiations for the treaty to the concurrent attitudes of France and Britain towards the Italian question and the desire of each to gain the support of the other for its policies. The levels of duties for English exports to France were fixed by a tariff convention in the autumn of 1860.

(2) Parliamentary Debates, third series, clvi (1860), p. 839.

by pointing out that concessions made under it to French goods would be extended to all others. 'What we enact for her we shall at the same time enact for all the world.'(1) Thus Coventry would have to face competition from other producers of ribbons - notably Switzerland - in addition to France.

The treaty and the budget were especially important for the silk industry, since this was the only major textiles interest in Britain still to enjoy protection: and among British towns it had perhaps the greatest implications for Coventry, so uniquely dependent upon silk. The treaty, holding out the prospect of both greatly increased foreign competition in Britain for its staple industry and (it seemed at the time) the probable denial of opportunities for it to compete fairly in France against her ribbons (if the French tariff were fixed at a level at or near the thirty per cent permitted) was discussed much in the city from the end of January onwards.(2) At one extreme was one apparently tiny group that argued for total and unconditional acceptance. This was the view of John Gulson, silkman, and J.S. Whittem, a currier. They believed in free trade. Every step towards it was good. Ribbons could meet foreign competition at home and the French attempts to protect themselves by a high tariff would merely inhibit the efficient working of their industry and would thus be to Coventry's advantage: at length they would see this and follow Britain's example.(3) They were supported by the Coventry Herald, edited by Charles Bray. He had retired from the business of ribbon manufacturer in 1856, after failing to make a success of it:(4)

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(1) ibid., p. 837. For this paragraph in general, see ibid., pp. 812 et seq. The reduction of the duties on wines and spirits, and the abolition of those on manufactured goods, provided for in the case of France by the treaty, were extended to the goods of all nations by 23 Vict., cap. 22: An Act to amend the Laws relating to the Customs.

(2) See the Coventry Weekly Times, 1 February 1860, which contrasts the anguish and apprehension in Coventry with the reception given to the treaty by Manchester and elsewhere, where 'reference to it by public speakers has been received with great enthusiasm ... Nothing less than a paradise of good trade and pleasant living is expected if the textile manufactures of these thriving towns are admitted into the French market, and the light wines of Burgundy and Languedoc are brought within the reach of the English working man.' The details of the treaty were not fully known until Gladstone's budget speech of 10 February, but the principles at least were known in Coventry three weeks before.

(3) Coventry Standard, 27 January 1860.

(4) Charles Bray, Phases of Opinion, p. 89.

but Bray was always happy to throw others into the battle of life that had beaten him. He now discovered that it would have been better if the protective duty had been removed from ribbons fourteen years before (though Bray had not in fact argued in the interim for its abolition). 'We think that had the duty been removed when the tax was removed from bread, the present time would have found us much further advanced in improvements, the trade steadier, and wages, therefore, on the average of the whole year, higher.'(1) Free trade since 1846 had led to prosperity in Britain. 'Is this experience to go for nothing, or is Coventry an exception to the whole country, and to be the only protected city in the kingdom?'(2) Coventry had nothing to fear from French competition: except that (Bray added with a sidelong glance at the recent attitudes of the ribbon weavers) they had not 'tied their hands with absurd restrictions on machinery'. Above all, Bray did not wish to insist on reciprocity. 'Reciprocity means that a nation will not allow itself to buy in the cheapest market, unless some other nation can see the policy of doing so also, and England is required to cut its own tail off because France has had its tail cut off.'(3)

At the opposite extreme the Coventry Standard called for the outright rejection of the treaty,(4) which revitalised its fear of France and its ancient hatred of Cobden. Its editor, Benjamin Poole, had been thirty years before a keen advocate of corn law repeal and universal suffrage in the Coventry Political Union. He now wrote leading articles of which George Eld would thoroughly have approved.(5) The treaty was part of Napoleon's 'entire scheme of aggrandisement and domination'.(6) In his plots, which had resulted in 'a piece of secretly devised despotism and treachery to the British people' he had been aided by 'the huxtering negociations and truculent intervention of Mr. Cobden to get up a treaty which is a disgrace as a national transaction, and a flat contradiction of all the free trade

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(1) Coventry Herald, 17 February 1860.

(2) loc. cit.

(3) loc. cit.

(4) Or, rather, of the bill to give effect to its provisions by reducing or abolishing the customs duties.

(5) George Eld had retired from the editorship in November 1858 and was succeeded by Poole, who had been his assistant for some years. See Chapter 10, section II.

(6) Coventry Standard, 3 February 1860.

theories to which his life has been devoted'.(1) Poole saw hypocrisy in Cobden's action and the treaty: the real motive of a pretended concern for national interest was the aggrandisement of the cotton trade, which the Manchester men believed capable of leaping over the tariff barrier the French would erect.

> Millions of spindles and myriads of cotton looms, with their hundreds of thousands of emaciated human beings attendant thereon ... are in their estimation a more commanding investment than anything else which nature or art can present ... Messrs Cobden and Bright ... are boldly attempting to subordinate the ribbon and watch trades of Warwickshire, together with all the other scattered branches of industry, to the all-absorbing men of the cotton trade.(2)

That the French were not going to offer reciprocity and admit Coventry ribbons duty-free proved the hypocrisy of calling this a free trade treaty: but the principle of our removing the protective tariff on foreign ribbons was the chief evil - aggravated by the failure to give even the months of grace to be enjoyed by the Worcester glove trade: Poole was not willing for the treaty to be accepted if it were amended so as to include reciprocity. The free traders' argument that foreign competition was necessary to improve the industry was repudiated: our national genius and energy had already improved it, under the protective system - just as it had done under prohibition before 1824 - and had built an industry so efficient that the weavers enjoyed a standard of living unequalled elsewhere. The Coventry ribbon trade paid higher wages than the French and the Swiss - 16s or 20s a week as against 9s or 10s - and so could not compete: the treaty would mean lower wages. 'The weavers, as they value what little comforts they enjoy, are bound to give this insidious and unprincipled treaty their most determined opposition.'(3) When the confirmation of the treaty by parliament

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(1) ibid., 17 February 1860. Poole was referring in his last phrase to the Manchester orthodoxy of the 1840s and 1850s, which strongly preferred unilateral movement towards free trade - in the belief that this would lead to national prosperity and eventually to imitation by other states - to bipartisan treaties of commerce. But in the event, of course, Britain did not enact merely the provisions of a narrow treaty. See also Coventry Standard, 24 February 1860: the treaty was 'not a treaty of free trade, but one of bondage to Napoleon and the Cobdenites'.

(2) Coventry Standard, 23 March 1860. Poole went on to repeat the old charge that Cobden and Bright had been against limiting working hours by statute, and attacked their philosophy of 'cheap manufactures'. See also ibid., 20 April 1860, arguing that Cobden, who had enjoyed a benefit of £40,000 subscribed by friends, was the 'paid tool of the Lancashire cottonocracy'. Cf. the Standard's attitude to Cobden and the Anti-Corn Law League in the 1840s: See Chapter Ten, section II.

(3) ibid., 10 February 1860.

was certain, Poole commented that 'the ribbon trade must be sacrificed to propitiate Napoleon III and the coal and cotton interests': the weavers would be told by the 'cold-hearted economists' that if they could not obtain work they should get another job: 'comforting language this to men forty or fifty years of age, and we only wish that those who use it were compelled to make the experiment which they recommend'.(1)

In demands for the complete rejection of the new commercial scheme the Standard was joined by the newspaper that normally stood at the other end of the political spectrum, the Free Press. Its editor, W.F. Taunton, son of the veteran radical William Taunton, made his chief ground of attack the folly of making agreements with a nation and a man so untrustworthy as France and Napoleon III, and the unrepresentative system of government in Britain which made such a treaty possible. Taunton commended the attitude of C.J. Fox to the commercial treaty of 1787. France was Britain's natural enemy: in wars against her Britain's huge national debt had been contracted.

> The peace pretenders, who hope that swords will be made into ploughshares and spears into pruning-hooks, by this treaty of commerce and amity, can have little thought of the character of the French people ... The records of history, the experience of the past, and the ever recurring revolutions of France, ought to teach us to place no reliance upon any treaty that can be made with so fickle a people. We should neither fear nor defy them, but, at all costs, maintain our national independence.(2)

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(1) ibid., 2 March 1860. For this section, see also the leading articles of 27 January, 9 March, 16 March 1860, and 27 April 1860 - the last an attack on Ellice and Paxton for accepting the principle of the treaty. 'Never was there a more cruel mockery of representation, than in the circumstance that this unprincipled and wicked treaty should have been supported by the members for this city.'

(2) Coventry Free Press, 24 February 1860. See also ibid., 9 March 1860, in which Taunton disparaged the 'puling, whining whisperers' who discounted the need for the Volunteers. 'The political burglar, whether foreign or domestic, is less likely to make an attack upon our rights andprivileges if he knows we are prepared to meet him.' Taunton came increasingly to see Cobden as naive, and Napoleon as untrustworthy, as the latter's Italian policy was shown to be self-interested in the early months of 1860. 'How any rational and reflecting being could ever believe the oath, much less the word, of this Imperial imposter and political Ananias we are at a loss to conceive ... The unconditional alliance that has recently been made by the cottonocracy, represented by Messrs Cobden, Bright and Co. with the French Emperor, clearly proves that the day of political foresight, as well as chivalry, is fast waning away, if not entirely gone.' He recommended towards France a 'dignified reserve ... not to be crouching, fawning and trembling at the brute force of France' (like Cobden and his friends). ibid., 30 March 1860.

Both the way in which the treaty had been negotiated and its provisions were denials of popular right, and reasons for extending the franchise and giving the people more control of government.

> The voice of the people demands representation, it claims freedom of thought and freedom of expression, and although the representative principle may not in this case have been absolutely ignored, yet the secret commercial diplomacy of the transaction between the Emperor of the French and the British Cabinet savours more of the vile centralising system of German despotism than of English liberty.(1)

Most Coventrians followed the Standard and the Free Press in wanting complete rejection of the treaty. According to the Standard, more than half the ribbon manufacturers did. Aldermen Lynes and Browett, and W.H. Bray and Thomas Robinson (all ribbon manufacturers) were the most obvious members of this group. Lynes and Browett proposed a motion at a meeting of the city council deploring the treaty and arguing that it would depress weavers' wages: the motion was passed unanimously. At a meeting of the Chamber of Commerce W.H. Bray argued that ribbons were a luxury - a fit subject for duties that protected native industry and assisted the revenue. Thomas Robinson argued that France had the advantage of much cheaper labour and 'taste' - great superiority in design. The worst French machinery was superior to Coventry's best - and if we introduced French looms the Ribbon Weavers' Association would prevent its being used, at least profitably.(2) Above all, 'the ribbon trade was the natural trade in France, but it was an exotic in Coventry, and would only extend here under very peculiar circumstances'.(3) Nathaniel Poole, the weaver and freemen's leader, agreed with this protectionist line of argument. At length 2105 Coventrians signed a petition against the treaty and budget.(4)

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(1) ibid., 24 February 1860. See also ibid., 3 February 1860, and 22 June 1860: 'For men, who have for years been lecturing about the power and majesty of the people, to concoct schemes and arrange treaties of trade which have affected the happiness and depreciated the property of 1000s, without first consulting them, appears to us a very strange way of proving the utility and strength of the representative principle of self-government'.

(2) Robinson was referring here to the union's successful battle, in 1858 and 1859, to compel payment by the list in power factories.

(3) Coventry Standard, 27 January 1860. Robinson added that reducing the duties on French wines would lower the consumption of English barley by the drink trade and harm the agricultural interest.

(4) See Coventry Standard, 27 January, 17 February, 24 February, 2 March 1860 for this section. See also the letter of N. Poole in ibid., 17 February 1860 - arguing that the treaty would eventually lead to lower wages but that liberal manufacturers would not admit it because they wanted to shield the Whig government: and the letter of 'A Weaver' in ibid., 2 March 1860, arguing that the subject is 'essentially a working man's question'.

Many took a middle course. They were certainly reluctant for the tariff to be removed: but they were dissuaded from protectionism by the desire to act consistently with the free trade ideas they had held over corn - or at least by the obvious futility of not doing so. This group therefore settled on the demand for complete reciprocity with France. Thus Alderman Wyley, a manufacturing chemist and a free trader, thought at the Chamber of Commerce meeting in January that continued protection was not feasible but that Coventry could at least in equity ask for the totally free admission of her ribbons to France. This group grew in February, partly because it became increasingly apparent that parliament would not grant to Coventry the continued protection not enjoyed by other interests. A deputation from the city council and the manufacturers, with local M.P.s in attendance, saw Gladstone at the beginning of the month. They put the protectionist case, without result. 'The courtesy of the Rt. Hon. Gentleman was great, so was his caution, for while he listened to the statements with great attention, he maintained a calm taciturnity and gave no information that could in the least enlighten the deputation.'(1) But in addition it became increasingly believed in February that all was not lost if the tariff went. The new situation was made clear at a public meeting in St. Mary's Hall called by the mayor to discuss the question. He announced that James Hart and Josiah Cash, two leading manufacturers with the most advanced looms, had recently found after questioning London wholesalers that the cheap ribbons in which they excelled would still enjoy an advantage of price in Britain over similar French ribbons after the tariff had been removed and despite (they said) the high wages paid in Coventry. The ribbon industry had a prosperous future - provided that it was able to compete unhindered in France. For once, the weavers' leader Thomas Read agreed with them. And the intellectual and practical difficulties in the way of asking for continued protection were

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(1) Coventry Standard, 10 February 1860. The speaker was William Taunton. See also Coventry Weekly Times, 8 February 1860. Gladstone was undeceived by the deputation's argument that the revenue would suffer if the tariff was removed. 'The manufacturers of Spitalfields, and those of Coventry, ... are most excellent citizens, and no doubt contribute their share to the revenue, but my right hon. friend will not tell me that their great activity, their speed in rushing up to London, and urging their representations upon this subject, has arisen from their interest in the British revenue. ... I took the liberty of saying to one of the deputations "It seems to me this is much the case of the corn law once again" ... The answer was "Oh, dear no; not the least like the corn law" ... they are not adherents of free trade without protection.' Parliamentary Debates, third series, clvi (1860), p. 840.

apparent in the arguments of J.C. Farn, veteran radical and free trader, and onetime weaver. He argued (as the trade had so often) that ribbons were a luxury and that, therefore, it would not have offended the principles of free trade to keep the tariff. 'There was no similarity between the present case and the abolition of the corn laws. The abolition of the corn law was a national necessity.' (1) Gladstone would have benefited the poor more by removing the remaining duties on necessities - tea and sugar: 'he objected to the treaty, as a financial reformer'.(2) But realising that the protective tariff was certain to go, Farn concentrated on the unfairness of the treaty in removing it completely while the French were permitted to retain theirs and were free to increase it to thirty per cent in eighteen months. 'This treaty was like the boy who went to the butcher's shop to get change for sixpence, and when he had got it said he would bring the sixpence another time.'(3) Farn argued that the ribbon trade should enjoy a gradual reduction of the tariff - like the glove industry - and at least that the French and English ribbon trades should be treated equally. Farn's mood was dominant at the meeting. Richard Hartopp and William Taunton, other veteran radicals and weavers' leaders, expressed similarly angry views. But the need to refrain from suggesting to parliament a course which it was certain not to adopt had been emphasised by Ellice and Paxton. They had helped with the drafting of a petition which did not ask for permanent protection - but merely for complete reciprocity and transitional protection for English ribbons. This, moved by Taunton and Edward Goode, was adopted.(4)

Edward Goode's newspaper, the Coventry Weekly Times, gave support to this moderate course. Before the details of the treaty

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(1) Coventry Standard, 17 February 1860.

(2) loc. cit. Later, Farn denounced the treaty as 'the foulest measure of injustice ever brought under the consideration of our Legislature'. ibid., 30 March 1860.

(3) ibid., 17 February 1860.

(4) For this section, see Coventry Standard, 27 January, 17 February 1860, Coventry Weekly Times, 1 February (J.C. Farn's letter attacking the treaty), and 22 February 1860. A Nuneaton meeting took the same line as Coventry's. From the first, Edward Ellice had argued that entire reciprocity was desirable, and that a continuation of protection was impossible. See his letter in Coventry Standard, 3 February 1860. See also his letter to the Rev. S.H. Widdrington in ibid., 11 May 1860: he thought that the ribbon trade was badly dealt with by the treaty, but that as a whole the treaty would benefit British industry.

were announced it counselled a prudent reservation of judgement. When they were, it found them 'not merely as bad but even worse than was anticipated' - in respect, that is, of its lack of tariff reciprocity and the provision of article XII, that the trade marks and patterns of France and Britain would be mutually defended by their courts. It would no longer be possible, the Times lamented, for Coventry to copy French ribbons without payment.(1) But it denounced the woeful prophecies of Thomas Robinson and Nathaniel Poole and - for once - agreed with James Hart that Coventry could beat France at home.

> We have outgrown the necessity for protection. Under its sheltering wing the industry and wealth of our country did once cower and crouch, but we no more desire to return to its shadow now than we desire to return to the spoon meat and bibs of our childhood ... We ask only to meet our competitors in a manly and open way, on fair and level ground.(2)

The Weekly Times regretted that the bill amending the customs duties eventually passed without amendment but counselled the trade to make the best of things and not despair: it thought that the French might be persuaded to grant complete reciprocity and that in any case the advantages of the treaty to many other manufacturing areas in Britain would bring an increased demand for ribbons.(3)

The bill passed after several attempts had been made to obtain concessions for Coventry's trade. Edward Ellice was the second member to speak, following Disraeli, after Gladstone's budget speech on 10 February. He accepted the principle of further steps towards free trade but protested strongly against the fact that France was not offering full reciprocity in the treaty and against the brevity of the period that Coventry was being given to accommodate itself to

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(1) Coventry Weekly Times, 1 February, 15 February 1860.

(2) ibid., 22 February 1860. See also ibid., 1 February 1860: a leading article reproving Thomas Robinson for his gloomy predictions at the Chamber of Commerce meeting and arguing that even if things were as bad as he said Coventry could meet the challenge. 'If our best machinery is scarcely superior to the worst of theirs, if our best designs are clumsy and inartistic in comparison with theirs, have we neither the skill, nor the capital, nor the enterprise to find a remedy for these deficiencies? What if the ribbon trade is an exotic, as Mr. Robinson suggested, must it be fenced around with all manner of artificial protection? ... Are not most of our manufactures exotics? Are the cotton trade, and the carpet trade, and the cloth trade, and the watch trade, and other similar trades indigenous? What is there on this wave-washed isle of ours that is not an exotic, save coal and iron, fogs and swamps, berries and acorns?'

(3) ibid., 29 February, 7 March 1860.

the removal of the British tariff.(1) Joseph Paxton spoke to the same effect during the committee stage of the bill to give effect to the British side of the treaty by amending the customs duties. He and Ellice had helped to frame a Coventry petition which was carefully calculated to draw the maximum amount of parliamentary support by asking not for continued protection but for full reciprocity with France.(2) Referring to this petition, he argued that his constituents most complained

> that they had been bargained away for a French Treaty, without the prospect of receiving any compensation whatever. He himself was a Free Trader, as were also his constituents; and they were prepared to give up the silk duty if an arrangement could be made by which their productions could be admitted into France upon the same terms as those of France would be admitted into this country.(3)

He therefore moved an amendment to the effect that the silk duties would be removed only from the goods of any country which permitted the free importation of British silk manufactures.(4) C.N. Newdegate, the Tory member for North Warwickshire, supported him. Most did not, seeing the amendment as a refusal to accept the full logic of free trade (which regarded foreigners' failure to implement reciprocity as a hindrance to them, rather than to Britain) or as a covert call for protection. John Bright, member for Birmingham, denounced the backwardness of its Warwickshire neighbour.

> Protection not only made arts and manufactures wither and decay, but it also seemed to enfeeble the mind and reasoning power of those who were subject to its influence. In its advocates there was an utter want of logic, an absence of faith, and a giving way to terror, of which even children ought to be ashamed.(5)

The amendment was lost by 68 votes to 190.(6)

C.N. Newdegate made a further attempt to gain concessions for silk at the report stage of the customs duties bill early in March.

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(1) Parliamentary Debates, third series, clvi (1860), pp. 874 et seq.

(2) This was the petition moved by Taunton and Goode at the February meeting in St. Mary's Hall.

(3) Parliamentary Debates, third series, clvi (1860), p. 2110. Paxton pointed out that Coventry, Macclesfield, Derby and Spitalfields had petitioned against the removal of the duties; Manchester had not - but the reason for this was that its silks had not been protected by duties against French competition anyway. In 1859 the silk tariff had raised £387,000, of which £166,000 had been produced by ribbons. ibid., pp. 2108 et seq.

(4) Journals of the House of Commons, cxv (1860), p. 101.

(5) Parliamentary Debates, third series, clvi (1860), p. 2121.

(6) ibid., p. 2132.

His amendment proposed the retention of the protective duties on silk goods until 1 October 1861, the date by which France was to settle her tariff on British silk imports. He wished, that is, for a bargaining lever to extract the greatest concessions from France. Ellice did not support him - arguing that any further delay in the removal of the duties would merely aggravate the uncertainty, panic and cessation of business that the ribbon trade already suffered from owing to apprehension of the effect of French imports. He asked merely for an assurance that at the forthcoming convention at which tariffs were to be negotiated the Chancellor of the Exchequer would press the French government to remove all the silk duties. His constituents 'had a right to demand that their interests would not be sacrificed for political purposes'.(1) Gladstone gave this assurance. Ellice voted against Newdegate's amendment, which was lost by 51 votes to 179. The act giving effect to the treaty proposals received its third reading on 2 March. The import duties on manufactured goods (including silk goods) were removed the following day.(2)

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(1) ibid., pp. 2194 et seq. Paxton would not support Newdegate either. He and Ellice explained their attitudes fully in letters to S.H. Widdrington, Vicar of St. Michael's, in Coventry Standard, 11 May 1860.

(2) Parliamentary Debates, third series, clvi (1860), pp. 2180 et seq, 2203. Journals of the House of Commons, cxv (1860), p. 104. The act was 23 Vict. cap. 22.

II

The 1860 strike

The weavers' victory in 1858 and 1859 - their consolidation of the list in the outdoor trade and their imposition on the factory masters of the piece-work system, with payments calculated by the list - had been made possible by an exceptionally fortunate set of circumstances - the strong and continued demand for ribbons in those years. Employers were able to absorb additional costs. Weavers were able to obtain payment by the list and were not compelled through underemployment to work below it if they were to work at all. Yet for many years the trade had normally suffered from an excess of labour which imperilled the list system. Eventually a labour surplus was certain to recur: especially since the productive power of the trade continued to grow. In October 1859 a third branch of the A-la-bar Loom Society was founded to accommodate outdoor weavers clamouring for steam-looms for their cottage factories in the belief that the competition of the large factory had at last been mastered. Large-scale investment in a-la-bar looms continued for some months.(1) But the check to prosperity came quickly. From the autumn of 1859 onwards fashions turned against the trimming of hats and dresses with ribbons. The trimming masters therefore turned to the production of other sorts of ribbon, for the hair and lingerie markets. Thus they competed with the established manufacturers in those branches. In the spring of 1860 fashion turned against figured ribbons too; only plain ones were in demand. The weather was cold and wet in the spring of 1860 and depressed the market, usually then at its peak. An additional trouble was that the price of China silk - a chief source of Coventry's supply - rose by 100 per cent in 1859 and then dropped equally dramatically - which made it

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(1) Coventry Herald, 28 October 1859.

difficult for manufacturers to sell the previous year's goods at a profit.(1)

But the greatest shock to prosperity and stability was a result, undoubtedly, of the Cobden treaty. The Coventry ribbon trade was extraordinarily ignorant about the industries whose competition it had to meet from March 1860. The manufacturers sent a deputation to France and Switzerland in the summer of 1860 to discover the most elementary facts about them;(2) the Coventry Weekly Times devoted two leading articles in the spring to recounting the history and geography of Switzerland for readers with, presumably, only the vaguest knowledge of that far-off land. Most surprisingly, spokesmen for the trade were often ignorant of even the tariff imposed by France on foreign ribbons - an ignorance that indicated how little Coventry had attempted to export ribbons to France. Thus the report of the Coventry Chamber of Commerce on the Cobden treaty in January attacked the unfairness of the alleged French prohibition on the import of ribbons, and the hope that it would be replaced by a completely free importation. Newdegate repeated the charge that France forbade the import of ribbons in the Commons in March. Gladstone pointed out that in fact their importation was subject only to a tariff of 7 per cent - less than half the duty that until then had been levied on foreign ribbons entering Britain.(3) But by the treaty France had the right to increase the tariff to 30 per cent.(4) More importantly, the exact effect of French and Swiss competition on the British market was unknown; and all the more because of its being incalculable did the trade fear it, despite the brave predictions of Hart and Cash in February. And when unrestricted continental competition began in March all fears seemed confirmed. The British public preferred continental ribbons. French ribbons were no cheaper (though no longer dearer) but had better 'taste'; Swiss ribbons had the advantage of price. 105,000

(1) Coventry Herald, 5 August, 2 September 1859, 4 May, 6 July 1860. Coventry Standard, 13 April, 29 June, 27 July 1860. Coventry Free Press, 20 April 1860. Silk Supply. A Handbook of the History of Silk, the Rearing of the Silkworm, and the Culture of the Mulberry Tree (Coventry, c. 1861), pp. 29 et seq.

(2) Coventry Standard, 30 March, 20 April 1860. A weavers' deputation followed in August.

(3) Coventry Standard, 20 January 1860. Parliamentary Debates, third series, clvi (1860), pp. 2126, 2201. It is true that the import of many other varieties of silk goods were prohibited by France until the treaty.

(4) By the tariff convention in the autumn of 1860 France in fact continued the duty on ribbons at the existing rate of seven per cent.

lbs of foreign ribbon entered Britain in March and April 1859; in the same two months of 1860 127,000 lbs entered. The Coventry Standard pointed out that the extra ribbons had deprived 1000 Coventry a-la-bar looms of five months' work. In May 1860 52,000 lbs entered, as against 27,000 lbs the year before. Fears grew greater as did the imports.

Most significantly for the weavers, the masters' old attitudes to the list of prices, and to piece-work in factories, fast changed. The most backward masters, some of whom had lent their covert support to the weavers during their struggle with the Bunch of Six in 1858, increasingly began to feel that they could not afford to pay by the list, if they were to meet foreign competition at all. The thrusting masters - best able to meet foreign competition - had no reason to favour either the weavers who had beaten them or the list that impeded their efficiency. The majority of masters, large and small, backward and progressive, feared or hoped soon after the treaty was announced that the list would have to go, at worst so that they might survive at all, at best so that they might acquire the capital deemed necessary to compete with the continent. One manufacturer said to the Rev. S.H. Widdrington, when he investigated the condition of the trade in April, that 'You may burn all your looms; you must get one loom to do what ten do now, and then you may compete with the French and the Swiss'.(1) They were encouraged in this attitude by the ribbon wholesalers, who argued that severe price-cutting was the only way to meet foreign competition.

Manufacturers began to cease giving work out because of apprehension at the effect of foreign imports in the week after Gladstone's budget speech. In the weeks that followed more and more weavers were laid off. At the beginning of March one manufacturer took the unprecedented step of auctioning off, at bottom prices, £6,000 worth of ribbons that no wholesaler would buy; similar auctions followed in melancholy succession. By the middle of March more than 2,000 looms and between 5,000 and 6,000 weavers were idle in Coventry, and 9,000 weavers in north Warwickshire as a whole. By the end of March many factories were on half-time. By May 3,000 looms and between 7,000 and 8,000 weavers were idle in the city. By June many factories were completely closed; none was in full work. So many cottage factories in Hillfields were stopped that their tenants, after pressing their landlords, were granted partial rebate of rent because they were not using their steam-power. S.H. Widdrington,

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(1) Coventry Standard, 4 May 1860.

vicar of St. Michael's, who gave himself to the weavers' cause throughout this year, toured the city to discover the amount of distress. He found many families in destitution, and others supported by tiny incomes. Many small masters in the outdoor trade had been forced to stop their a-la-bar looms and dismiss their employees. These small masters were too proud, or, if like most they were freemen, too careful of their franchise, to accept poor relief. Widdrington told the meeting convened by the mayor to raise a relief subscription of his visit to one small master.

> Yesterday afternoon about one o'clock, he was sitting with a cup of coffee and a hard crust of bread before him and was asked whether that was all his breakfast. He burst into tears and said 'This is not only my breakfast ... neither I nor my wife touched dinner yesterday'.(1)

Many weavers stayed in bed all day to conserve their energy. The relief fund committee, under Widdrington's chairmanship, joined forces with the Philanthropic Society to cope with the distress. Thousands of weavers and their dependants were supported by the bread doles distributed twice weekly at St. Mary's Hall and the White Lion from April onwards.(2) Widdrington collected specimens of Coventry ribbon for presentation to the Queen in an attempt to persuade her to patronise the industry, and so convince the British public that although they were no longer cheaper than the French or the Swiss they were not inferior to them in 'taste'. The Queen accepted the ribbons but the public was not convinced. J.C. Farn told a revealing story in May; a shop in the Burges displayed on sale ribbons which it claimed were French; they sold well until it became known that they were made in Foleshill; their sale then ceased.

The existence of an increasing number of unemployed weavers gave greater temptation to employers who did have weaving to be done

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(1) Coventry Standard, 13 April 1860. Widdrington, a Tory, added his comment. 'He said "free trade for ever", but do not let this city be offered up as a holocaust to carry out Mr. Gladstone's policy.' But Widdrington was himself so pessimistic about the future of the ribbon trade that in May he was taking active steps to float a cotton-weaving company in Coventry, rather than encourage the emigration to Lancashire which agents from the cotton area had already arrived in Coventry to promote. Widdrington's venture won the approval of the Coventry Standard, 1 June 1860: 'Warwickshire may yet be made preferable to Lancashire with its "devil's dust", its murky drudgery, and the eternal whirl of spindles and steam'. The Standard forgot that Coventry's cotton-mill would also have 'spindles and steam'.

(2) One casualty of the slump was the Great Fair. For the first time for many years, Wombwell's circus did not think it worthwhile to visit Coventry.

to depart from the list. A few manufacturers in both the outdoor and the factory branches were offering reduced prices by the beginning of March; sometimes the reductions were to be permanent, sometimes they were said to be temporary, and sometimes they applied only to certain kinds of ribbon for which foreign competition was especially feared. Most of the proposed reductions were then withdrawn when the weavers' association protested. But by the end of April the old system had broken down. Some manufacturers were paying the list of prices - at great hardship to themselves - but many were not. Some factory masters had reverted to weekly wages. By June the majority of masters had decided that in the worsening conditions of trade each should pay what he thought fit. Many were offering reductions of one quarter on list prices. Only a minority were still paying by the list. Collectively, the manufacturers' association refused (while their deputation was still on the continent) to meet the weavers' committee.

The attitude of the weavers' leaders was, throughout this period, that the existing list of prices had to be maintained in the outdoor trade and in factories, at least until the manufacturers could prove the need to modify it; irregular piece-work payments in either, and weekly wages in factories, could not be countenanced. In April the Coventry association even promoted an abortive 'Convention of Artizans' - delegates from the ribbon-weaving area in Warwickshire, and Derby, Congleton and Leek - in an unsuccessful attempt to make the Coventry factory list general in England. 'They were warriors never to be at rest - never to lay down their arms', said Thomas Maclean in March.(1) Thomas Read of the factory branch declared in May that 'Free trade in labour was, in his opinion, a more odious and despicable doctrine that the institution of slavery in America'.(2) And, he added, 'for the sake of the honourable manufacturers who had paid the list prices, for the sake of the shopkeepers who would lose by a reduction in wages, and for the sake of their families, the weavers are bound to uphold the list'.(3) Richard Hartopp supported him.

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(1) Coventry Standard, 9 March 1860. He added that 'the people who talked loudest about educating the people were those who were scheming by reducing the wages of the fathers to keep their children in perpetual darkness'.

(2) ibid., 1 June 1860.

(3) Coventry Herald, 1 June 1860.

> Our own history and that of other countries - all history, ancient and modern - proved that the system the manufacturers wished to introduce could not be successfully carried out. It led to the accumulation of great wealth on the one hand, and to the misery of abject poverty on the other. Such a condition of things ought not to be introduced into Coventry, and he trusted that by every effort in their power they would resist it. (Cheers) (1)

Thomas Read promised eventual victory.

> The elevation of the working classes must come, though they might have to suffer long yet. The children of Israel groaned under Egyptian bondage 400 years, but deliverance came at last. He believed the time would come when the working man would earn enough by eight hours work a day not merely to keep him in existence but to get the comforts of life. He believed the bountiful Creator designed no less for his creatures. And out of the present adversity good would arise.(2)

Even the Coventry Free Press, which had traditionally supported the weavers, did not share this hope. It urged the manufacturers to meet the weavers collectively in a conference to discuss the future of the list. It made clear its belief that the weavers would have to agree to a reduced list of prices in the altered conditions of trade - 'the sudden and sweeping competition which the commerce of Coventry has been exposed to through the reckless and unjust treaty with France'.(3)

> The dark clouds which lower over us, may, in a short time, be dispelled if justice, prudence, and wisdom are mutually exercised by masters and men; but if, on the contrary, the cry is raised 'No Surrender' and this is made the watchword, then we are certain that a vast amount of misery and destitution must be endured.(4)

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(1) loc. cit. See also Hartopp's speech in ibid., 8 June 1860. 'He contended that weavers and others were justified by the example of barristers, medical men and clergymen in keeping up the price they charged for their work, and they would be acting unjustly to themselves and their families if they failed to do so.' See also Hartopp's long letter in ibid., 15 June 1860, arguing that under the newly reintroduced weekly wages system in one factory a weaver had been paid 17s. for work which under the list of prices he would have received £6.5s. for. 'Can slavery worse than this be imagined? What motive is there to exertion, to industry, to frugality, or to manly independence under this system?' He went on to anathematise the capitalist class. 'They keep a surplus on the labour market, they monopolise the means of employment and machinery, they drive men from domestic employment into the factory, they make women do the work of men, children the work of women; they allow no egress, no outlet, no vent for the workless crowd. They by these means multiply the evil, and then coolly tell us it's the law of supply and demand ... These are facts; mine is but one of the many voices sent from the heaving bosom of human life.' See also Hartopp's letter in Coventry Weekly Times, 9 May 1860, arguing that 'free labour aims at converting human beings into incessant wealth-producing machines'.

(2) Coventry Weekly Times, 27 June 1860.

(3) Coventry Free Press, 20 April 1860.

(4) Coventry Free Press, 4 May 1860. See also the leading article of 5 April 1860.

The Standard too urged the manufacturers to meet the weavers and explain matters to them. It made clear that since the treaty had very wickedly removed from English women the financial penalty they had been wont to pay for indulging their absurd preference for French 'taste', the result of this meeting would be the acceptance by the weavers of not merely a reduced list, but perhaps no list at all, and certainly weekly wages - and also any improved looms thought necessary for efficiency. There had long been among weavers too much jealousy of masters, too little appreciation of the need for high profits and of the essential harmony of interests between the two sides of industry. 'As to the hacknied raving about the "tyranny", the "cruelty", and "selfishness" of the masters, it is the wildest possible folly.'(1)

The Herald also stressed the need for high profits, and investment in productive looms. Lessons should be learned from the cotton trade.

> There has been no waste, no play; but everything has been made to fit into each other, and to work smoothly in the most economical manner possible. And this must be the future of the ribbon trade if we are to compete with the French and the Swiss.(2)

Bray saw the reintroduction of weekly wages in factories as an essential precondition of efficiency; but they should be combined with a premium for production above the norm. And for the outwork trade Bray wanted the list of prices to continue though at a lower level; he foresaw the evils that would come from uncontrolled reductions. Most typically, he exhorted both sides to be reasonable.(3) The most telling expression of the general feeling in the city that the present system could not be maintained - that weavers should accept work at below the current list price - was the low subscription to Widdrington's relief fund for unemployed weavers. Only £170 was collected - a far lower sum than was usual; this with the £220 remaining from the 1857 fund was exhausted by 3 July.(4)

Their leaders' determination was shared by many weavers, both factory and outdoor, who refused to work below the list and proudly said so at meetings. Some factories were closed by June because the

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(1) Coventry Standard, 1 June 1860. See also the leading articles of 6 April, 20 April, 22 June, 6 July 1860.

(2) Coventry Herald, 4 May 1860.

(3) ibid., 9 March, 4 May, 8 June 1860.

(4) The accounts of the relief fund are in Coventry Herald, 28 September 1860. Unprecedentedly, no manufacturer attended the distress meeting in April, apart from the mayor, Henry Soden. See also the letters of 'Mutual Sympathy' and 'Humanitas', Coventry Standard, 20 April and 22 June 1860, urging the weavers to abandon their fruitless attempts to maintain the list of prices.

weavers would not accept weekly wages. But their proprietors were still able to get their ribbons woven, in the outdoor trade. For when weavers had to choose between poverty and work below price, some chose the latter course. In part they were compelled to do so by the expense of their a-la-bar looms:

> the enormous outlay to begin with, and the fearful expenses that are constantly running on, work or play, make it absolutely necessary for the majority of weavers who possess them to have work for them, if work is to be had; if not at one price, they must take it at another.(1)

As the crisis worsened and more masters departed from the list such backsliding increased throughout the weaving area, thus making it increasingly difficult for the few masters who still held by the list to do so. The weavers who refused to work below price tried old expedients, without success. In March levies of 3d. a week on a-la-bar looms and 1d. a week on handlooms in work were agreed at meetings. They were intended to raise a strike fund to compel masters to pay by the list. There were too few looms at work to yield much cash. In any case, many of those at work thought the building up of a strike fund a quite fruitless aim, for a trade so depressed; the list of prices was lost for ever.(2) The levy raised less than £2 a week. The doubling of the levy in June was an act of desperation. At the end of May a weavers' meeting decided to circulate the names of all weavers who refused to pay the levies or who worked below price. The latter were to be treated as 'knobsticks' - visited by members of the committee to convince them of their error. This had been tried with signal success in 1820; it now produced none, although an 'auxiliary committee' was elected to assist the executive in this task. In June weavers at Attleborough turned to an equally old tactic - 'donkeying' - though not as forty years before of a man; an effigy of a weaver known to be working below list price was ridden backwards on a donkey and then burned. Unable to obtain a meeting with the manufacturers' association the committee interviewed individual masters, fruitlessly. Daniel Butler reported in June:

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(1) Coventry Herald, 22 June 1860. See also the letter of 'A starving Weaver', Coventry Standard, 8 June 1860: 'he has paid levies to the committee till his family want bread; and now that they are starving, he wishes to know if he is still to be prevented taking employment at the best terms he can?'

(2) See the letters of Bernard Taylor and 'A Sufferer Out of Work' in Coventry Standard, 8 June 1860, and 'A Weaver' in ibid., 29 June 1860.

> One manufacturer, from whom they expected better things, on account of his connection with a religious body, told them when they appealed to his benevolent feelings, that it was not a question of benevolence; but his object in embarking on trade was to get money.

Paying below the list was a necessity for him.(1) Then, at the end of June, the manufacturers' deputation returned from the continent.(2)

The manufacturers' deputation was dismayed by what they found on the continent. French and German looms were not usually better than those in Coventry but their workmen were often paid less. Switzerland seemed the chief challenge. The factory system was well advanced, and both its looms and its organisation were more efficient than Coventry's. Hours of work were longer, at thirteen a day, exclusive of meal breaks. The factory weavers were paid lower wages, and by the week, calculated against a work-norm; wages were reduced if work fell off. But it did not, since the workers were as dependable as their looms. Absence without cause led to immediate dismissal. At any instance of neglect or carelessness the police were called in and those held to be responsible summarily punished. 'We were assured that neglect of work and insubordination are almost unknown both here [that is, Zurich] and at Basle.'(3) The Swiss loom-making industry was more efficient than Coventry's; the workshops had 'every possible appliance that can be imagined to turn out first-class looms with as little hand labour as may be. Nothing is left to chance skill, as with us.'(4) The outwork trade was better organised; manufacturers took the silk to the weavers' shops and collected the ribbons; weavers did not have to waste up to one third of their time visiting the warehouse, as in Coventry.

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(1) Coventry Weekly Times, 27 June 1860.

(2) This section has been based on Coventry Standard, 17 February, 2 March, 9 March, 23 March, 30 March, 6 April, 13 April, 20 April, 27 April, 4 May, 11 May, 18 May, 25 May, 1 June, 8 June, 15 June, 22 June, 29 June 1860; Coventry Herald, 9 March, 30 March, 11 May, 25 May, 1 June, 8 June, 15 June, 22 June, 29 June 1860; Coventry Weekly Times, 29 February, 7 March, 14 March, 21 March, 4 April, 18 April, 25 April, 9 May, 16 May, 6 June, 27 June 1860; Coventry Free Press, 5 April (especially the article on the panic in the city), 20 April, 27 April, 4 May 1860; The Times, 7 April 1860. See also P.R.O.: M.H. 12/13882, W. Hine to Robert Weale, 26 June 1860: an analysis of the current distress in the city - blaming the change in fashion, and the fact that fear of the effect of the treaty led to a cessation of manufacture.

(3) Report of the Deputation appointed ... to ascertain the present position of the Trade, with reference to the late Commercial Treaty with France (Coventry, 1860), p. 10.

(4) ibid., p. 12.

Weavers' attitudes harmonised well with this efficient industry. They used the good stove placed in every cottage to advantage, economising on food and fuel: they managed their household budgets very carefully. The burden of the report was that only by becoming similarly efficient, by extensive capital investment and, above all, by a reconstruction of basic attitudes could Coventry hope to compete.(1)

The report was published early in July. The manufacturers' association held several long meetings. The minority, of honourable masters, held out for the list. The majority wished to abrogate it. In the end the association reached no collective decision. Instead, forty-four manufacturers (out of fifty-seven in the association) signed an address on 9 July withdrawing their names from the list, giving as their reasons the infractions of it that had already taken place, the unfairness of a system which allowed the cottage-factory proprietor to make greater profits than the factory-master - and thus to impede his advance - by taking advantage of surplus labour by paying weekly wages to their weavers. Above all was a list wrong

> Because a compulsory uniform list has been used as an instrument of intimidation and persecution.
> Because it constitutes a barrier to the encouragement and adoption of many required improvements in the production of ribands, and hampers the trade with artificial restrictions.
> Because the value of labour depends upon circumstances, and must fluctuate according to supply and demand; and a List Price is framed on the assumption that the weaver's labour has a fixed and unchanging value.
> Because we are now exposed to the competition of manufacturers abroad who have the command of a free-labour market.(2)

The 'Executive Committee' of the two weavers' associations met immediately. It resolved to appeal to the mayor to bring about an end to the dispute by negotiating with the manufacturers.(3) The

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(1) ibid., pp. 5 et seq. The weavers' associations, lacking firm information of their own collecting upon the nature of continental competition, despatched a deputation to France and Switzerland. It left on 5 August and returned towards the end of the month.

(2) P.P.: [2765] H.C. (1861) xxii: Reports of Inspectors of Factories for the Half-year ending 31 October 1860, p. 41. Coventry Standard, 13 July 1860.

(3) C.R.O.: Minutes and Accounts of the Ribbon Weavers Association, 1860, 9 July 1860. This is an unpaginated book. Many leaves are missing; others are covered with childish drawings and scribbles. No doubt the book was used by a young relation of one of the committee members after the collapse of the strike. Entries in the book start with the strike on 9 July. The book makes clear that for the strike the two associations (the RWA and the FOA) which though nominally united in 1856 had remained in practice largely separate, amalgamated their funds and their collecting system, and were led by the 'executive committee' representing both branches. Representing the outdoor branch were Johnson, Wheatley, Barnwell, Clay, Maclean and Sheffield.

cont ...

committee knew that an all-out strike seemed impracticable. The associations had no strike fund.(1) In the new climate of opinion in the city they were unlikely to get much public support. Sheer hunger might compel many weavers to break the strike. On the other hand, a list was essential. After the committee meeting George Gilbert brought weavers from their looms by ringing a handbell throughout the town. Between 8,000 and 10,000 collected on Greyfriars Green. Band was in the chair. He could not recall so important an occasion. Thomas Maclean, the veteran leader of the outdoor weavers, argued on behalf of the committee for an attempt at negotiation. He accepted that a list was essential, but argued that a revision of the list to meet the new state of trade was necessary too. The manufacturers ought to be asked to meet the committee to agree upon a lower list. If they refused, a strike would have to follow.

> He wanted them ... to be determined, at any price, to have a list by which they were to be guided in future ... If they had no list they would have no security that half a crown this week would not be two shillings next week, one and sixpence the next, and again till it came to nothing. A voice: 'That's what they want'.(2)

Thomas Read, of the factory section of the committee, argued that the manufacturers were making an excuse of continental competition. Coventry weavers were the best in Europe. Thomas G. Read(3) of the outdoor weavers thought that the manufacturers might as previously be brought to change their minds, from weakness or goodwill.

> The document that had been read to them bore the signatures, not of the bunch of six, but of a whole forest of nuts. He, however, believed that they would be able to crush every one of them; there were good kernels in some of those nuts, but others rattled and had been rattling for a very long time. There were names to the handbill which when he first read he could not speak, because they were men for whom he had entertained respect - yes, men whom he respected even now.(4)

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(3) cont.
Representing the factory operatives were Hartopp, Thomas Read, Wright and Nathaniel Poole. Butler was secretary and Barnwell assistant secretary. Band, of Stoke, was chairman. Two weeks after the strike began three representatives of the branches in Foleshill, Nuneaton and Bulkington joined the executive committee. The committee met at 9 a.m. each day during the strike. ibid., 11 July, 12 July, 23 July 1860.

(1) The first surviving entries in the accounts in C.R.O.: Minutes and Accounts of the Ribbon Weavers' Association, are for 21 July. The two associations, then united, had a balance of £11.11s.8d.

(2) Coventry Standard, 13 July 1860.

(3) He was not a member of the committee.

(4) Coventry Herald, 13 July 1860.

Daniel Butler clinched matters: 'A List, A list, a list - and not free labour'. Maclean's motion was carried unanimously.(1)

Later in the day a deputation saw the mayor and Richmond Phillips, the Secretary of the Manufacturers' Association. The manufacturers refused to negotiate collectively under any circumstances. The mayor could not help. Another meeting was called on Greyfriars Green. Deputations of support had already arrived from Derby, Leek and Congleton. Maclean moved on behalf of the committee that weavers in the employ of manufacturers who had not signed the document and who were continuing to pay by the list should continue at work. There were thirteen such manufacturers, one of whom employed 3,000 weavers.(2) This tactic would be fair to these honourable masters and (though Maclean did not say so) it was the weavers' only hope of acquiring a strike fund. The crowd, incensed with the manufacturers' refusal to meet the deputation, booed him. From the ranks of the crowd, Joseph Pritchard moved that there should be a general strike, in all weaving areas within fifteen miles of Coventry, until the manufacturers had signed collectively the lists of prices for both the factory and the outdoor trades. This was carried unanimously, as was Gilbert's motion that the names of all those who worked during the strike should be published.(3) The committee, though their recommendation had been turned down, now backed the strike. They enjoined the meeting to peaceful behaviour. 'Any man or woman who attempted a disturbance was an enemy sent in by other enemies to destroy their unity,' said Maclean.(4) 'He hoped,' said Hartopp, 'they would constitute themselves a moral police to help to preserve the peace of the City'.(5)

The committee was appealing to the memory of old modes of conduct: when the list had been supported by city and honourable manufacturers and the weavers had replied by peaceful and deferential behaviour. It did so again in its handbill in reply to the manufacturers', written for the weavers' association by J.C. Farn.(6) The

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(1) Coventry Standard, 13 July 1860.

(2) This was almost certainly Abijah Hill Pears.

(3) A week later, when the committee was being criticised in the city for allegedly fomenting the strike, Zachariah Wheatley asked a Greyfriars Green meeting if the committee had caused the strike. The crowd yelled back 'We did'.

(4) Coventry Standard, 13 July 1860.

(5) Coventry Herald, 13 July 1860.

(6) C.R.O.: Minutes and Accounts of the Ribbon Weavers' Association, 12 July 1860.

handbill argued that the trade had been prosperous under the list, that the abrogation of the list was not necessary to meet competition - the system was 'compatible with the improvement of our manufacture' - that indeed if fancy ribbons were inferior to competitors' it was because there had been no list for them (in the outdoor trade at least), that the weekly wages alleged by the manufacturers to be paid by outwork first-hands to undercut the factory list were paid very rarely - 'a competent weaver will not accept of them if he can help it' - and that above all the list was essential

> Because the object of setting aside a list is to bring down wages to the lowest possible level, in despite of the fact that lower wages have never brought extended trade or improved manufacture. Because the List of Prices gives at all times to each manufacturer a fair chance in the market with his competitors, prevents numberless disputes between employers and employed, and tends to promote peace and harmony among all parties concerned; and, though it cannot perhaps meet every case of difficulty, is nevertheless proved by experience to be the best system that has yet been devised.(1)

Another weaver put their case to the public in similar terms, arguing that the existence of foreign competition had not been demonstrated, but that if it were, the continent was a poor exemplar for Englishmen.

> A few of the masters fear that the French can make ribbons cheaper than we can. I scarcely believe this; but suppose they can, are they models worthy of our imitation if they allow themselves to be gulled by a tyrant who gags their press, robs them of their rights, and degrades them before the world? ... Must we be reduced to the same pitiable extremity, because the Swiss live in hovels, and squat upon the ground? Because they gulp their food while they work? ... If we <u>are</u> above them, let them rise up to our position, not us sink down to theirs. I protest against being continentalised. ... The list has been a lever which has moved the commercial world. Yes, what the power of gravitation is to the globe, - what the chart is to the traveller, - what the compass is to the storm-tossed mariner, - a List of Prices is to the ribbon trade, and all parties concerned in it ... without it there is nothing for us but strife, confusion and ruin - yes, ruin ... 'Cursed is he who oppresseth the hireling in his wages'.(2)

But the ancient harmony - the product of paternalism and deference - to which the weavers' leaders appealed was merely a memory to most weavers themselves: and to most manufacturers and the public generally. It became even more so - the bonds of paternalism became even more tenuous and relaxed - when the weavers' meeting that decided on the general strike repudiated their committee's suggestion that hands of the honourable manufacturers should stay in

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(1) P.P.: [2765] H.C. (1861) xxii, pp. 39 et seq.

(2) 'J.L.' of Foleshill, <u>Thoughts upon the List and Strike</u> (Coventry, 2 August 1860), pp. 3 et seq.

work. This action, consigning to probable ruin the honourable masters who had struggled through the vicissitudes of the spring to continue to pay by the list, would have been unthinkable thirty years before; no other single action so much alienated the city. It tried the patience even of S.H. Widdrington, the weavers' only friend in the city's establishment.

> When I go to one of the oldest manufacturers in this town - a man who has honesty on his countenance and benevolence in his heart - he says to me 'Do you think I have been used well? I never kept back from a weaver the full price, I am prepared to pay the full price, and my weavers turn out, my warps are left to rot in my looms; is that a return for having been a good master during a long life?' I replied 'I have nothing to say'.(1)

The weavers' action testified to their determination; it made reconciliation even more unlikely. Weavers reluctant to strike were visited in their homes and persuaded to stop work. By the evening of Monday 9 July all looms in the weaving area of Warwickshire were stopped, except at Townsend's factory at Attleborough and Day's in the city; Day's hands were employed for weekly wages and did not wish to strike. The executive committee's repeated injunctions to behave peaceably were sometimes disregarded. A crowd of weavers from Coventry surrounded Townsend's factory on Tuesday morning. They smashed the windows, but could not get into the factory because the workpeople held them off, led by Townsend's son armed with a sword. The crowd entered the house of 'Satin Jack' and cut the warps out of his loom. There was much 'Jeffreys and Barlowing'. There were only two policemen on duty. One was injured by a stone. Thirty policemen from Coventry were brought out by omnibus. When they arrived the crowd had dispersed. At the next weavers' meeting Richard Hartopp gravely deprecated the weavers' action at Attleborough. In the city 3,000 surrounded Day's factory on Tuesday morning. Many of Day's 400 weavers could not get in. Only 20 remained in the afternoon. The factory closed. A large number of policemen from the Warwickshire county force was brought in to clear the crowd. There were scuffles, and arrests. The police behaved roughly: 'those who only remonstrated with them were hurried off to a felon's cell'.(2) When Maclean visited the police office in the evening to speak on behalf of the arrested weavers a policeman abused him.(3) The justices of the peace issued

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(1) Coventry Standard, 27 July 1860. The master was A.H. Pears.

(2) Coventry Weekly Times, 18 July 1860.

(3) Though Maclean told a weavers' meeting that the policeman was not a Coventrian - but 'some ruffian that had been imported from the rural district to do the work'. Coventry Standard, 13 July 1860.

proclamations against the intimidation which had been used to compel many weavers to stop work; weavers' processions through the city, and the use of a bellman to summon weavers to meetings, were forbidden as likely to cause a breach of the peace. So were district meetings, which would have stretched the resources of the police. In the city, only meetings on Greyfriars Green were permitted.(1)

In the weeks of the strike daily meetings of strikers were held there; there were also many meetings in the northern parishes. These meetings were militant and rejected all compromise on the list question.(2) The manufacturers refused to negotiate with the executive committee. They were willing to negotiate with their own hands separately, and to offer terms individually. In the second week of the strike, therefore, the committee announced, through Hartopp and Sheffield, that it was willing for negotiations to be handled by any body approved by the trade if better terms might be obtained that way. There were cries of 'No, No', from the meeting; when Joseph Pritchard moved that all negotiations should be handled by the committee it was carried by a large majority. The committee was given a vote of confidence. This did not extend to any suspected of lukewarm support. Jephcott, though not a member of the executive committee, was about to be sent to Manchester on its behalf to attempt to raise support for Coventry there. A meeting heard of his going; they disapproved, and a party ran off to prevent him - and caught him outside Coventry station with his carpet bag.

Towards the end of July Widdrington attempted to negotiate a compromise and convened a meeting of weavers in the Corn Exchange on 25 July. His long speech revealed the mental anguish suffered by a benevolent and intelligent Tory of the old school.

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(1) For this section, see Coventry Standard, Coventry Herald and Coventry Free Press, 13 July, 20 July 1860, and Coventry Weekly Times, 11 July, 18 July 1860. See also The Times, 16 July, 18 July 1860.

(2) A speech by Thomas G. Read suggests how strong still - despite the difficulty of obtaining work at all - was the desire of factory weavers to maintain their list, and to gain by it both high wages and easy conditions of work. Read had just returned from Congleton. 'When he walked through the factory he saw one man reading a paper, and another in the arms of Morpheus (Cheers). When he awoke, in answer to a question, he said he earned 14s. per half a cut or half a length. He would make three half cuts a week - he could do this comfortably and go to sleep. (Laughter and cheers).' Coventry Standard, 27 July 1860.

> I am, and I pray God that when I die the epitaph put on my grave may be that I endeavoured to be in my life and generation the working man and the poor man's friend ... I should like to see every weaver living in that private manner which is so conducive to happiness and morality. I should like to see every man living in his house, with his two looms, and steam power, having his own children to assist him, and stopping work at five, the children going to school in the evening, the baker giving his gentle tap at the door daily, and the butcher the same.(1)

This was why he had suggested that a committee of six manufacturers and six weavers should sit constantly, with an expert London silkman as chairman, to decide upon wages. The weavers cheered this announcement. But, Widdrington continued, the manufacturers had turned it down. They deserved fair treatment too. The practice of some outdoor weavers of paying weekly wages to their a-la-bar hands while they were paid by the list was monstrous. So was the decision to strike the whole trade and so attack the honourable masters. The French treaty, which like the bad weather and change of fashion so oppressed the weavers, was equally damaging to the masters, many of whom faced ruin. Widdrington disliked factories, but saw that they alone could meet foreign competition and that weekly wages were necessary to their full efficiency. 'I say to you that we depend on machinery; we cannot go behind.'(2) Unless the weavers compromised the city faced ruin. He therefore proposed that the question of the list of prices should be deferred for a year and that meanwhile the weavers should go back to work at what terms they could obtain. At his suggestion there was disorder in the room and cries of 'No, No, we won't have it'. Widdrington concluded his resolution by saying 'Let every man who votes against it support those families who may be plunged into ruin by his improvidence or his prejudice'. Only a few voted for it. A 'forest of hands' was raised against.(3)

At weavers' meetings afterwards speakers praised Widdrington's sincerity but damned his plan. 'Free labour for twelve months would be free labour for ever', said Daniel Butler.(4) 'He urged them to strike up for the rights of labour, and prepare to be starved to

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(1) Coventry Standard, 27 July 1860.

(2) loc. cit.

(3) See for this section, Coventry Standard, Coventry Herald, Coventry Free Press, 20 July, 27 July 1860, Coventry Weekly Times, 18 July, 25 July, 1 August 1860.

(4) Coventry Standard, 27 July 1860.

death rather than be starved into submission. They had taken a position which they must maintain, or else they would appear like simpletons before every working man in the kingdom.'(1) But mere intransigence would not suffice, as it had two years before. Then, the great majority of weavers were united behind the demand for the factory list; there were few blacklegs, and the levies paid by those not on strike were both an expression and a precondition of that unity. Now the weavers had a tiny income - their unions possessing merely £11.11s.8d. on 21 July - and the public relief fund raised in the spring was exhausted by the end of July, after three distributions of food in that month. Starvation, if nothing else, was forcing weavers to return to work. Both Day's and Townsend's factories were working again by the end of July, weavers having returned to the 'yells and hisses of an excited mob'.(2) Accordingly, the committee suggested at the end of July that the manufacturers should be asked individually to consider a new list of prices and that the hands of those who signed it should be permitted to return to work; they would of course pay levies to those still on strike. A meeting agreed to the proposal. The committee drew up revised lists for the factory and outdoor trades - rather lower than the previous lists. They were accepted by another weavers' meeting, and then presented to the manufacturers individually. Their replies were read to another meeting.

> Mr. Newsome said that he did not mean to recognise any stipulated rates of labour; that it was not his intention to sign that list or any other got up by the weaving community, and he believed it was the intention of the other manufacturers not to do so. They meant to have free trade in labour. He said the weavers were too respectable - that they had had their own way eighteen years, and it was time the manufacturers had their way ('Oh, Oh'). He pointed to one man in the deputation and as good as told him he had taken it pretty easy for the last three years, for whenever he went his evening's walk he met that man.(3)

(1) ibid., 3 August 1860. NB also Richard Hartopp's bitter criticism of the manufacturers. 'The raw material of wealth existed in inexhaustible abundance around them, and he asked himself how it was that, under such circumstances, the mass of the people were unhappy? An inward monitor replied, because man - grinding, grasping, selfish, avaricious man stepped in, and wanted to deprive his fellow creatures of the munificent gifts of an all-wise Creator. If trade happened to be at all depressed, attempts were generally made to reduce wages; then, if the working classes resisted, some Malthusian, starve-beggar political economist crept out of his shell and told them that wages ought to be regulated according to the laws of supply and demand, but when trade was good - when there was a great demand, they neither thought nor talked about such things.' Coventry Herald, 27 July 1860.

(2) Coventry Herald, 27 July 1860.

(3) Coventry Standard, 3 August 1860.

Only two or three manufacturers agreed to sign the list unconditionally. About half a dozen said they could not sign it because they had to be free to alter prices at need, but that they would pay by it for the time being; some agreed to abide by it if others did. All who in some sense acknowledged the list were outdoor masters. Some aggrieved honourable masters would not see any deputation till their contracts were completed. The great majority of manufacturers, including all the factory masters, refused both to sign the list and to agree to pay by it, French saying 'You may go to hell; you may stand out eight years if you like'.(1)

Following this approach to the masters, a rift appeared in the ranks of the strikers at the end of July. A proposal was made that the hands of those who had not withdrawn their names from the list should be permitted to return to work. There was another that the hands of those manufacturers who in some way undertook to pay by the list (even though they would not sign it) should be permitted to work, provided that they promised not to work below the list and were furnished with cards from the association to hang in their windows - cards bearing their name and their employer's and the number of looms working. This tactic would prevent fraud. Thomas Read of the factory branch vehemently disagreed with these proposals. From the first he had not wanted a strike, but he was against going back to work now in 'dribs and drabs without a proper understanding'.

> Unless the trade was prepared to stand by the list drawn up, or devise some other plan by which the two branches might go on in unanimity, he was not prepared any longer, looking at the sacrifice made within the last seven months, to say 'Walk the streets, and let what trade there is go to the outdoor branch'. He would not ask his fellow factory operatives whether they were prepared any longer to make this sacrifice in preference to weekly wages.(2)

Thomas Read gained the support of the meeting. There were unanimous votes by the factory operatives and the outdoor weavers for their lists - and against piece-work rates any lower than the list, or

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(1) loc. cit.

(2) Coventry Standard, 3 August 1860. NB also Richard Hartopp's bitter criticism of those outdoor first-hands who let down the whole trade by paying weekly wages to their own journeymen: Coventry Herald, 3 August 1860. See also Hartopp's defence of the list: 'The "rod and staff" of the Coventry weavers was a list of prices, and he knew their determination was that they would almost sooner be starved than go to work again under free trade in labour. If the price of labour was depreciated the bar looms would be worth next to nothing, and their owners would be obliged to enter a factory.' Coventry Standard, 10 August 1860.

weekly wages in factories. The strike would stay till the list was generally signed. There would be no return to work.

But letters were appearing in the press indicative of the hostility to the strike among many weavers themselves: saying that it was impossible to gain the list, that to fight for it was folly, that the strike meant ruin for weavers.(1) At the beginning of August demoralised weavers were drifting back to work throughout the area. The strike was being broken. The committee now recommended a reversal of the decision of the weavers' meeting only one week before; it decided to recommend that the hands of each manufacturer should return to work if he was prepared to pay by the list of prices and if they agreed not to work below it.(2) This proposal was put to a meeting on Greyfriars Green and agreed; this time Thomas Read accepted it. The outdoor weavers employed by eight or nine manufacturers went back. Most of their masters had not signed the list, but merely agreed to pay by it; Franklin's was one such firm. Barnwell of the executive committee justified their weavers' return in words far less militant and abrasive than had been common a month before. 'It was not the wish of the weavers to achieve a triumph.. They only wanted fairness and justice. They did not wish Messrs. Franklin's to compromise their dignity by signing any list if they had pledged themselves not to do so.'(3)

This was a desperate attempt by the militant weavers to organise a partial return to work which would not undermine their position: to prevent a general return at below list prices or for weekly wages in factories. In fact, the existence of 'ticketed' weavers made it easier for an unwarranted return to work to take place by blurring the boundaries between those who were acting with the union's approval and those who were not. By the end of August 600 were at work in the city with the trade's sanction, displaying tickets in their windows, and paying levies to the union; more were

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(1) See, for example, letters of 'Reign of Terror', Coventry Standard, 13 July 1860, and 'A Working Man', ibid., 3 August 1860; 'A Weaver', 'An Outdoor Weaver' and 'Fair Play', Coventry Herald, 20 July 1860, 'Consistency', and 'Amicus', ibid., 3 August 1860. 'Amicus' told of a weaver who was stopped from working by strikers and who died from starvation. 'As a man I ask you, is not this as much a murder as if those persons who stopped his loom had cut his throat?'

(2) C.R.O.: Minutes and Accounts of the Ribbon Weavers' Association, 10 August 1860.

(3) Coventry Standard, 10 August 1860.

at work without sanction. About 500 factory weavers were at work in the city and more in Bedworth, Attleborough and Nuneaton - even at the factories of the weavers' most intransigent enemies, the Cash brothers and James Hart; 3000 weavers were at work in the whole of Warwickshire.(1) More were still out than at work: not that they could all have obtained weaving if they had asked for it. As the number of blacklegs increased so did enmity between them and strikers. From the beginning of the return to work a police constable was permanently stationed in every street in the weaving district. The police court was filled each week with cases of abusive conduct and occasionally of assault. Timothy Chattaway called after Mary Brittain, one of Day's weavers. 'He called out that she was a knobstick, and one of John Day's whores.'(2) Anne Lapworth, armed with a broom, was accused of calling 'knobstick' after another of Day's weavers; the blackleg had been guarded by a police constable, who arrested Lapworth. She was convicted on his evidence and had to give a £10 bond to keep the peace. John Ludford called Joseph Callow 'knobstick'. 'The complainant remonstrated with him, and the defendant became very abusive, put his tongue in the complainant's face, and said he would take off his coat, and give complainant what he wanted.' Ludford was bound over.(3) These were typical examples of the insults daily offered. One complex case showed how the strike was sundering families and neighbourhoods. Accused, complainant and witnesses all came from Hillfields and most were related to each other. Edward Corby of Payn's Lane had taken out 'unticketed' work. One woman called out 'There goes the knobstick canary' and his cousin Elizabeth Garratt said 'I was a bloody thief and my friends a bad lot', then beat him. Corby's face was bathed with marshmallows by neighbours; Elizabeth Garratt was fined 40s. with the option of two months in prison.(4) Incidents like these and the strike itself were bitterly attacked by weavers at work, or wishing to be. 'Does not this impious conduct surpass the Pope, Austria, Naples or France?', asked 'A Weaver', referring to intimidation.(5) In addition, though

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(1) The list of prices seems to have been rarely paid. Manufacturers framed their own individual lists for piece-work. The factory masters were returning to weekly wages (to maximise the profitability of their looms) and basing their lists of prices for outdoor work on them - a reversal of the weavers' tactics of two years before.

(2) Coventry Standard, 10 August 1860.

(3) Coventry Herald, 17 August 1860.

(4) Coventry Standard, 24 August 1860.

(5) ibid., 17 August 1860.

no weavers' meeting concluded without the committee exhorting it not to use violence but merely peaceful suasion,(1) and though the strike had demonstrably been started and continued by the militant rank and file, both intimidation and the strike were blamed on the committee, who, it was said, were prolonging it for the sake of the 3s. a day subsistence allowance each received from association funds. 'An Old Committee Man' reminisced about the weavers' committee of 1830.

> The old committee of that period never rendered themselves so thoroughly obnoxious to the manufacturers as to be excluded from all communication with them, nor became so disliked by the tradesmen of the city, as to be regarded as the destroyers of its best interests. The old committee never established a trade tyranny and reign of terror, nor sanctioned the passing of resolutions such as the despotism of Austria would not impose on its subjects. [There were no levies in the old days either] but if ever an emergency arose requiring a few pounds, the manufacturers and principal tradesmen were generally their most cheerful and best contributors.(2)

The strike had the support of the Weekly Times and the Free Press. Edward Goode, in the Weekly Times, commended the weavers' willingness to arrange a revised list of prices in the current depression, and bitterly denounced the manufacturers' continued refusal to meet them amicably, and organise in concert with them a controlled reduction. He saw in the masters' attitude a plan to smash the union; faced with it, the weavers had no alternative to striking and to rejecting Widdrington's scheme early in August. 'The truth is that the poor see prospective and constant misery in the attempt now made to reduce their prices, and they bear and will bear to the last extreme before they yield.'(3) He repudiated as 'gratuitous and ungenerous libels' the stories that the weavers were

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(1) It is not disputed that 'peaceful' methods were often rigorous and unnerving. See the cases quoted in the account of the Aggregate Committee of 1820, in Chapter Two, section II.

(2) Coventry Standard, 24 August 1860. See also the five letters of complaint in the same issue and the seven in ibid., 31 August 1860 about the powers, privileges and expense accounts of the committee, accusing its members of corruption and asking for audited accounts to be published. See also ibid., 17 August 1860: some anti-strike weavers published a handbill attacking the committee: 'they don't find us work or bread, and they won't let us find it for ourselves'. But, alleged the Standard, shopkeepers could not display this handbill for fear of having their windows broken. On this section as a whole see Coventry Standard, Coventry Herald and Coventry Free Press, 27 July, 3 August, 10 August, 17 August, 24 August 1860, and Coventry Weekly Times, 25 July, 1 August, 8 August, 15 August, 22 August 1860. See also The Times, 27 August 1860.

(3) Coventry Weekly Times, 22 August 1860.

lazy and their committee trouble-makers; 'the weavers of Coventry will bear comparison, for intelligence, industry, and morality, with any large body of operatives, and especially with those of Lancashire, where the demoralising factory system has long been introduced'.(1) W.F. Taunton in the Free Press offered a deeply considered criticism of the doctrines of the political economists. 'In their eyes, all moral and social tendencies disappear; nations are only many work-shops of production ... everything is to be calculated, and the laws of supply and demand are made the imperious masters of the labouring classes.'(2) These ideas, Taunton thought, had led the manufacturers to disregard the weavers' reasoned and moderate willingness to amend the list, by negotiation. The unilateral abrogation of the list made it a manufacturers' strike, to which the weavers had no possible response but the withdrawal of labour.

> We unhesitatingly say that we believe if the workmen were openly to abandon the list, and to declare that they were willing to accept a reduction of twenty per cent upon the rate of wages which they have recently been receiving, more than one half of them could not find employment. Then would commence that furious competition which we fear would inevitably lead to most disastrous effects, both to the employed and the employers ... the operatives will suffor an immense amount of destitution, before they will abandon the power of unity to protect the only property most of them have, viz, the value of their labour.(3)

At the other extreme were the leading articles written in the Standard by Benjamin Poole, onetime secretary of the weavers' committee. He denounced as folly the weavers' wilful refusal to accept that in the changed circumstances brought about by the iniquitous Cobden treaty (supported as it had been by some of the weavers' foolish leaders) manufacturers must be free to pay whatever they could afford;

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(1) ibid., 18 July 1860. See also the leading articles of 25 July, 1 August, 8 August, 15 August 1860.

(2) Coventry Free Press, 17 August 1860. Taunton went on to write that the cause of low wages and slump was not overproduction but under-consumption ... 'and that is the result of the present avaricious system ... before there can, in justice and reason, be declared an over-production of any article ... all must have been supplied with a sufficiency of their wants ... the money power of the capitalist has destroyed, to a vast extent, the consuming power of the producer, and locked up the hoarded wealth of human industry and intelligence'.

(3) ibid., 20 July 1860. See also ibid., 3 August 1860: 'Free trade in labour will give to the most avaricious and selfish, power to subdue the artizan; the hard and sad necessities of the humblest sons of toil would be made again, as they have been in times that are past, the instrument of commercial capital making war upon the rights of labour'. See also the leading articles of 27 July, 10 August, 24 August 1860.

he urged the weavers to return and throw themselves on the mercy and generosity of their masters; he denounced intimidation, argued that the committee was misleading the rank and file, and said in so many words that the committee was stealing the money given to it for the struggle.(1) At the beginning of the strike the conscience of Charles Bray, as revealed by his leading articles in the Herald, was much more troubled. He regretted that the manufacturers had not tried with the weavers Bray's favourite remedy for all ills - rational suasion; they should have tried to demonstrate to them that in present circumstances the continuance of the list was impossible. On the other hand, Bray thought the weavers too obstinate to grasp this point anyway. He balanced arguments against each other but when the scale finally tottered to a decision it came down on the manufacturers' side. Bray disliked free labour, yet it was now essential for progress. The list should be suspended for one year; Bray approved of Widdrington's plan.

> Overtake your competitors first, - go beyond them so as to command the American and other markets, and then, when you have generated a healthy and continuous demand for labour, will be time to demand a uniform and stipulated price for making; to insist on it now is mere madness and starvation, for if the masters give way it can only be to the destruction of their trade.(2)

At the end of the year the masters would themselves see that free labour was no more to their advantage than to the weavers' and lists would be re-instituted - for both the factory and outdoor trades. But they would not be, like the recent lists, calculated to impede the productiveness and profitability of the largest factories and favour the outdoor trade and the cottage factory.

> The increased production ought to go principally to the master, not all as at present to the hand; not to increase the master's profits, but to cheapen goods and meet competition, and thus enable him to find regular employment for his hands ... If the ribbon trade is effectually to meet foreign competition, and to take the same leading position in the markets of the world as the cotton trade does, it must be by the same means - by the aid of large capital, which alone can perfect improvements and effectually economise production. Now much as we are opposed at present on moral grounds to factories, yet it is in the factories and by the capitalists and not in the poor weavers' shops that those improvements must be made which we require to give us preference in the markets.(3)

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(1) Coventry Standard, 13 July, 20 July, 27 July, 3 August, 10 August, 17 August, 24 August 1860. The last three leading articles were entitled 'Nuts to be Cracked on the Green' - a reference to Thomas G. Read's speech in July.

(2) Coventry Herald, 10 August 1860.

(3) ibid., 13 July 1860. See also ibid., 20 July, 27 July 1860.

Towards the end of August - as the striking weavers showed their refusal to heed his advice - Bray's attitude became hysterical, losing the tone of prevaricating rationality which had for long been its distinguishing feature.

> Much that is set down for wilful obstinacy or sheer stupidity, might with more truth ahd justice be ascribed to mental disease. Any man, or any body of men, who constantly keep their minds fixed upon one single subject, and persist in looking at it from only a single point of view, will in time become utterly incapable of dealing with it in a rational and common sense manner ... will be, to all intents and purposes, so far, the victims of incipient monomaniaism ... The real question now at issue between the manufacturers and the weavers is not as to whether there shall be a reduction of a few pence per piece upon the making of ribbons henceforth, neither is it as to whether there shall be a stipulated price or not; but it is, whether a manufacturer of ribbons in Coventry ... shall be obliged to obtain the sanction and approval of a Weavers' Trade Committee as to the manner in which he shall conduct his business? - whether our staple trade shall be at the mercy not even of that Committee, but of the ignorant and noisy mob that usually assembles on the Green, or whether it shall have a fair chance of developing itself in the sharp but healthful competition that is before it ...?
>
> It is a severe lesson that our operatives have to learn, but learn it they must, or every inhabitant of the district will for ever suffer the consequences. If they have really made up their minds to die of starvation rather than earn a comfortable living under the only conditions possible at the present time, they must take the consequences of their own rash resolves ... This conclusion may seem cold-blooded and cruel, but it is only in the seeming; it seems cold-blooded and cruel for the surgeon to cut off a diseased limb, but it is in reality the highest philanthropy and the purest benevolence, for it preserves the body at the expense of the member; all would otherwise perish.(1)

All the evidence suggests that it was the Standard and the Herald, not the Weekly Times and the Free Press, that spoke for the city - or, at least, for the influential and moneyed part of it. The 'religious portion' of the strikers who met each morning and evening for common prayer and worship were especially grieved that apart from Widdrington no minister of religion would support them - even among the dissenting clergy whose chapels so many of them attended. John Theobalds of Alderman's Green (a lay preacher) said, 'There was one class of character he wanted to warn them against - his brother parsons'.(2) One, E.H. Delf, even declared against the list of prices. Butler replied:

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(1) ibid., 24 August 1860.

(2) Coventry Standard, 13 July 1860.

> A dissenting minister had declared that they ought to have free labour, and thus supported the oppressor against the oppressed. Were they real ministers of the gospel, who, while they preached to them of acting justly, and how the Saviour fed multitudes, withheld from them their daily bread, and starved them to enable their oppressors to gain their object?(1)

The arrest by the police of people guilty of merely verbal abuse of blacklegs showed - as weavers complained at their meetings - that the chief constable, Skermer, was different in his attitude from his predecessor Prosser. The difference reflected a more fundamental change; when Thomas Read went to see the mayor in August to ask for his intercession in the dispute the mayor replied that the factory weavers should accept their masters' offer of weekly wages. Read replied that 'Weekly Wages are like poison to the people; they won't listen to it'. The mayor then talked of intimidation and the way it kept many away from work. No good came of this meeting.(2) Shopkeepers - once a chief support of weavers in dispute - abused them and their committee.(3)

The financial result of the city's enmity was most keenly felt. The strikers had begun without any strike fund. Mottershead, a delegate from the Derby weavers, reproved them: 'The north country people looked on them with astonishment, for while admiring their heroism they could not but deplore their want of foresight, and attributed their sufferings to their own improvidence'.(4) A finance sub-committee of four was appointed by the executive committee to consider ways of raising money. Ten 'missionaries' were appointed, from among the ranks of the several committees of the association, to travel through England to raise cash. In addition, J.C. Farn (a sympathiser) travelled to the Potteries, Manchester and Rochdale to

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(1) loc. cit. NB the comment of Gilbert at the same meeting: 'He should like to know what this smooth coated gentleman with the white choker (laughter) would say if his masters, the people who go to his chapel, were to say "Trade is bad, and there are so many parsons in the market, you must come down"? (laughter)'. Gilbert later commented: 'They might depend upon it, that when a manufacturer gave a very handsome donation towards building a chapel he had an eye to getting it back again'. Coventry Standard, 10 August 1860.

(2) Coventry Standard, 24 August 1860.

(3) For this section, see Coventry Standard, Coventry Herald, Coventry Free Press, 13 July, 20 July, 27 July, 3 August, 10 August, 17 August 1860, Coventry Weekly Times, 11 July, 18 July, 25 July, 1 August, 8 August, 15 August, 22 August 1860.

(4) Coventry Standard, 17 August. The proposals for a revised union structure described in the same issue were intended to provide for a permanent strike fund: but by August 1860 it was of course too late. See Chapter Six, section I.

address meetings at the end of July. He also wrote a circular to the 'different trades of England' asking for help. The missionaries took with them 2000 copies of an address - An Appeal to the Working Men of England - and 2000 copies of the leading article in the Coventry Free Press for 27 July.(1) The association raised £1265.13.9d. during the strike.(2) Of this, £134.12.1½d. were raised by levies on those weavers who returned to 'ticketed' work, with the agreement of the union, in August. £769 were donated by the weavers' associations in Derby, Leek and Congleton.(3) £149 came from public subscriptions in the same towns. Sir Joseph Paxton gave £50, and the Amalgamated Society of Engineers the same amount. The bulk of the remainder came in small subscriptions from trades union branches and workshop collections in Birmingham, Leicester, Stoke-on-Trent and London and occasionally elsewhere; the amounts varied from 3s. given by 'working men in Yorkshire' to £10 given by the London bookbinders. Infinitesimal amounts were subscribed to the association from the public of Coventry: the corporation lodge of the Carpenters' Union gave £1, 'some watchmakers of Spon Street' £1.1s., the executive committee of the ribbon weavers' association itself 12s., and the public at large 9s.10d.: £3.2s.8d. in all.(4) Nothing testifies more clearly and directly to the hostility to the strike in the city. £265.3s.6d. were spent by the association on expenses: £66 were paid to committeemen in subsistence allowances and almost £200 on the solicitors' fees, the travelling expenses of 'missionaries', printing, postage and hiring rooms for meetings. £960.8s.6d. (or more than three quarters of the total subscribed)

(1) C.R.O.: Minutes and Accounts of the Ribbon Weavers' Association, 1860, 9 July, 13 July, 17 July, 19 July, 21 July, 1 August, 4 August, 8 August 1860.

(2) The accounts of the strike fund of the association are printed in Coventry Standard, Coventry Herald, and Coventry Free Press, 14 September. The totals there given have been checked against the surviving pages (about three quarters of the original) of the MS Minutes and Accounts in CRO. The printed accounts agree with them, which tends strongly to give the lie to the Standard's accusations of peculation during the strike. Both sets of accounts, however, are in an amateurish form: I have arrived at the total of £1265 by subtracting from the amount given in the press sundry items of expenses returned by the 'missionaries'. I can find no warrant anywhere for the statement by Mr. Prest (op.cit., p. 128) that £990 was raised during the strike.

(3) Delegates from these associations were present at Coventry meetings throughout the strike, urging resistance to the masters. They felt their own lists would be endangered if Coventry's were not reinstated.

(4) These details were drawn from Coventry Free Press, 14 September 1860, and C.R.O.: Minutes and Accounts of the Ribbon Weavers' Association, passim.

were spent on relieving distress among striking and unemployed weavers throughout the weaving area. Just over £300 of this was given to relief committees outside the city, and £653 to the 'special relief committee' for Coventry itself. This committee was set up early in the strike. The relief fund of the city - that is, the one managed by Widdrington - exhausted its funds by the end of July.(1) The weavers' association therefore opened another relief fund, under the management of sympathisers outside the union. The public gave far more to this fund than they did to the strike fund - £308.11s.1½d. (2) The difference between the two amounts demonstrates that though very few in the city were prepared to support the strike, many were still sufficiently sympathetic to the weavers to support the human results of it, or of unemployment.(3) Nevertheless, less than £312 were subscribed in the city for the benefit of the weavers during the strike of 1860, as against £1026 during the dispute of 1858-1859.(4) And during the earlier quarrel weavers on strike had been supported by continuous levies from those in work: there was no slump, no destitution. The earlier, and larger, contribution supported a strike; the second, and smaller, relieved acute human misery. When their different functions are realised, the two amounts stand in greater contrast.

Like the city in general, the Directors of the Poor were hostile to the weavers' cause. The directors' clerk wrote to the Poor Law Board in June 1860 that because of the difficulties faced by the trade - the collapse of the usual spring trade, owing to bad weather, change of fashion, fear of the effects of continental competition - the manufacturers could not make profits under the list of prices system. The abolition of the list would lead to an increase

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(1) It was reported by Daniel Butler (Coventry Standard, 13 July 1860) that the manufacturers had succeeded in getting this relief fund locked up for the duration of the strike. The charge is repeated by Mr. Prest (op.cit., p. 123) but was untrue. The accounts of the Relief Fund Committee (Coventry Herald, 28 September 1860) show that there were three distributions of bread in July and that at the end of the month the funds were exhausted.

(2) In addition, Edward Ellice gave £50 to the 'special relief fund'. The total reached by the fund was £1011.12s.1½d., including the £653 from the weavers' association.

(3) Coventry Free Press, 14 September 1860: accounts of the 'special relief committee'.

(4) Coventry Standard, 23 December 1859. See also Chapter Six, section IV.

in work and lower poor rates.(1) Not surprisingly, therefore, the directors turned a cold eye on applicants for poor relief during the strike. In the first two days of the strike thirty-six able-bodied men asked for poor relief. Four were taken into the workhouse, twelve were given out-relief in return for the labour test at the mill, and no fewer than twenty were refused relief altogether - apparently on the grounds that work was available for them if they chose to accept it. In the weeks that followed the number of applicants for relief fell off because of the rigour of the board's attitude.(2) Then in August, two of the four ribbon manufacturers(3) on the board told their colleagues that they and the other manufacturers could offer factory labour to any distressed weaver at weekly wages of between 16s. and 21s. The directors therefore decided that henceforth relief to able-bodied weavers would be denied totally and that applicants would be told that work at weekly wages was available. The further increase in the severity of the board's attitude made a continuance of the strike the more difficult.(4)

Towards the end of the month the deputation which the weavers' association had sent to France and Switzerland returned to Coventry. It brought little information which might be used by the weavers to justify the strike to the city. Though the deputation's report was not published till September, its substance was mentioned in the Coventry Standard at the end of August, and that journal adduced it as further proof of the folly of the strike.(5) What the deputation observed, indeed, agreed in essentials with the report of the manufacturers that had helped to precipitate the abrogation of the list, and the strike, two months before. The weavers, like the manufacturers, found the Swiss to be the chief competitive danger.

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(1) P.R.O.: M.H. 12/13382, W.W. Harris to Robert Weale, 26 June 1860.

(2) ibid., W.W. Harris to Robert Weale, 13 July, 18 July 1860, Robert Weale to Poor Law Board, 27 July, 1 August 1860.

(3) The board had eighteen members. The names of three ribbon manufacturers (elected by the St. Michael's guardians) are known - John Clark, James Hart and Benjamin Hickling. Weale stated that two of the four absented themselves from directors' meetings during the strike, apparently to avoid accusations of partiality. ibid., Robert Weale to Poor Law Board, 27 July 1860.

(4) ibid., Robert Weale to Poor Law Board, 22 August 1860. Coventry Standard, 17 August 1860. Also, the Cash brothers told the Foleshill guardians that they could offer work at weekly wages at their factory; the guardians therefore stopped relief for weavers in Foleshill.

(5) Coventry Standard, 31 August 1860.

> The Swiss manufacturers seem to be thoroughly imbued with the commercial spirit of the age, and quite aware of all the advantages to be obtained from division of labour, steam power, and etc. Added to which, they are surrounded by a well-educated, and comparatively sober and industrious population, well skilled in the making of ribbons.(1)

The adventurous Swiss manufacturers were increasing the number of factories powered by steam and water, as fast as Coventry's factories had grown since 1848. Their workmen were well attuned to factory labour; the recalcitrant were held in check by the threat of police action.(2) They were paid by weekly wages, with a production bonus; their weekly earnings averaged only 13s. per week. It was of little use for the deputation to argue that because food prices were lower in Switzerland 'the Swiss operative can live better on his 13s. per week than the Coventry operative upon 17s. per week':(3) the statement merely underlined the price advantage of the Swiss manufacturer. It was of little use to stress the advantages enjoyed by Coventry, as against Basle, by England's monopoly of the market for China silk; or the benefit that the Coventry weaver would gain if his silk were as fully prepared for insertion into the loom as his Swiss rival's was; or the good fortune, moral and physical, that would follow the more intensive exploitation of Coventry's resources. 'We need fear no foreign rivalry if we could only agree among ourselves to make the most of the advantages we really possess.'(4) With this peroration the manufacturers and the city heartily agreed - with the proviso that one of the essential advantages to be welcomed was the 'free labour',

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(1) Report of the Coventry Independent Deputation of Workmen appointed to visit the ribbon weaving districts of France and Switzerland (Coventry, 1860), p. 11.

(2) The report added that Swiss factory workers were more respectable and solid than the French, the 'character of the working population partaking more of the German than the French type'. ibid., p. 12.

(3) loc. cit.

(4) ibid., p. 15. For this paragraph in general see ibid., pp. 2 et seq. The deputation met Cobden in Paris; he was there to negotiate the details of French tariffs on British manufactured goods. He remarked to them that 'with the spirit of commercial enterprise so remarkable of Englishmen, together with their great mechanical ingenuity and their mighty appliances of steam, it was impossible but they must eventually take the lead in this as in every other staple manufacture of Europe. And it was more than probable, that in a few years, himself and his friend Gladstone might venture to come down and dine with the manufacturers and weavers at Coventry, and be well received.' ibid., p. 14.

with weekly wages for factory weavers, which the manufacturers' determination had by the end of August brought within their grasp: and which were amply justified by the evidence in the weavers' deputation's report - though the weavers might elsewhere deny it.(1)

But, naturally, though the manufacturers and the city received from the weavers' deputation's report further evidence to damn the strike, those weavers still out at the end of August did not. They succumbed only to superior strength and the threat of starvation. Shortly before the weavers' deputation returned S.H. Widdrington wrote an open letter to the weavers of Warwickshire. 'The crisis is awful. The sufferings of many most heartrending, and the end fearful to contemplate. The interposition of those to whom your interests are very dear is the only hope ... I know your penetration will enable you to discern the voice of a devoted friend.' Widdrington suggested a meeting to discuss his plan. The weavers' executive committee 'cordially accepted' his suggestion. (2) The meeting took place at the end of August, in the Corn Exchange. The room was crowded with weavers. They booed at the chief constable so loudly that Widdrington had to ask him to leave the platform. Widdrington, by contrast, was cheered. He declared that though he was the minister for many manufacturers he did not speak for them:

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(1) See the leading article in Coventry Herald, 21 September 1860, for the strongly argued view that the report confirmed the justice of the manufacturers' case - prevaricating though the report in places was. By contrast, the Coventry Weekly Times, 19 September 1860, speaking for the weavers and attempting to put as brave a face as possible upon the deputation's report, could not argue that it tended to destroy the manufacturers' case for 'free labour', and merely resorted to an appeal (necessarily feeble in 1860) to the manufacturers' kindness of heart. 'Let them have a little ambition not only to be rich, but to win a good name and to retire when they do retire with a stainless reputation.' In 1867 L.S. Booth and Joseph Gutteridge visited the silk manufacturing areas of France and Switzerland, under the aegis of the Society of Arts. They found continental looms for the weaving of plain ribbons inferior to Coventry's, but the figured looms better: and Swiss looms of all types were better made than Coventry's. There was 'division of mechanical labour - each distinct part having a separate tool for its production, all mathematically gauged and arranged to produce a certain result, and the consequence is, any number of looms made are counterparts of each other, adapted to the particular results they wish to obtain ... perfect self-acting machinery, facility of production of the woven fabric, and minimum loss of time, both to manufacturer and artisan employed'. Reports of Artisans selected by a Committee appointed by the Council of the Society of Arts to visit the Paris Universal Exhibition, 1867 (London, 1867), pp. 132 et seq, 142. See also J. Gutteridge, Lights and Shadows, pp. 178 et seq.

(2) Coventry Standard, Coventry Herald, 24 August 1860. C.R.O.: Minutes and Accounts of the Ribbon Weavers' Association, 24 August 1860.

they were opposed to a meeting because they thought the weavers were about to be starved into submission. Widdrington was sure that the weavers could not win by striking and that they would indeed starve unless they returned to work. 'You have fought the battle of labour against capital at the most fearful odds, in fact when there is no demand for labour. You have withheld your labour at a time when instead of inconveniencing you have convenienced your employers by doing so.'(1) Widdrington argued that in present circumstances the masters had to have the freedom to vary prices to meet foreign competition. On the other hand, the weavers should be protected from a destructive free-for-all. He suggested an 'elastic' list of prices. He proposed that the weavers should form a new association 'for the protection of labour', and that one of its duties should be the election of a 'board of consultees'. It would form part of a board of arbitration if the manufacturers could be brought to agree to provide representatives: but whether as 'consultees' or 'arbitrators' the board would decide each month what changes had taken place in the value of labour and on what terms the weavers would offer theirs. A minimum price below which the weavers should not work, and a variable sliding scale above it, were envisaged. Members of the new association were to pledge themselves not to work below the prices agreed by the board. Widdrington moved four resolutions embodying these proposals. They were accepted unanimously.

Widdrington then moved a fifth resolution - that since the first four had been carried the strike should end. Dissension now began. Thomas Read of the factory branch (and a member of the executive committee) argued that there was little chance of the manufacturers accepting the four resolutions if the weavers now returned to work. The fifth resolution would 'prostrate' the first four. He suggested that the strike should continue as a means of bringing pressure to bear on the masters - and that the fifth resolution should be considered again in three days when the masters had pronounced. Widdrington, distressed, argued that the weavers could expect no formal concession from the manufacturers on the four resolutions: they could merely trust to their goodwill. He recommended an immediate return to work: and pleaded with both sides to forget old animosities.

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(1) Coventry Standard, 31 August 1860.

> Let us blend in a common interest, let us cast aside our prejudices and love one another, and try to help one another; and there is no reason why Coventry should not be a shining star in the hemisphere of commerce, and have for its motto, 'Sic iter ad astra'.(1)

But loud cries of 'No' greeted his suggestion that the strike should end. Widdrington left the meeting. The weavers then chose a deputation of five prominent citizens - including Widdrington - to attempt to get the manufacturers' assent to the four resolutions.

The weavers met again the following day. The four resolutions were once again carried unanimously. Thomas Read and Johnson (one of the delegates from Derby) held out the prospect of eventual victory. Work could start almost immediately for those manufacturers who were prepared to accept the list of prices to be drawn up by the four consultees: the levies paid by these weavers could sustain 'indefinitely, in a respectable position' the hands of those (like James Hart) who would only pay by weekly wages. But other members of the executive committee - notably Maclean and Chambers - knew that Read's hopes were vain: there was no chance of any manufacturers accepting the consultees' list. They proposed a complicated resolution which shorn of its euphemistic verbiage meant a general return to work - in particular, a return by factory weavers to work at weekly wages if necessary. Its reception showed how militant were many of the strikers that remained. Cries of 'No! No! we won't be humbugged by that' came from the floor of the meeting, and one Camp spoke for the factory weavers present.

> His wife and family had gone without food for three days, and he did not see why they should do that if they were to be sold. He would die for the list if the trade acted with him; but he would not be sold; and if people were prepared to go in at a pound a week, he would go in at 15s.(2)

A decision on the resolution was deferred till the following day. Before then, the executive committee learned, from the deputation of five prominent citizens appointed two days before, that there was no hope that the manufacturers would make any of the concessions implied by the four resolutions. Widdrington had been right, Thomas Read wrong. He accepted that he had been, and joined with his colleagues in deciding to recommend an immediate return to work - in the terms of the resolution that Maclean and Chambers had proposed earlier that day - and to resign collectively if the next meeting of

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(1) Coventry Standard, 31 August 1860.

(2) loc. cit.

strikers did not agree. The committee's motion was accepted and the strikers returned to work - where weaving was to be had - unconditionally, on whatever terms the masters saw fit to offer them. By the beginning of September, the strike was over.(1)

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(1) This section is based on Coventry Standard, Coventry Herald, Coventry Free Press, 31 August, 7 September 1860, Coventry Weekly Times, 29 August, 5 September 1860.

III

The Aftermath

The most militant strikers, who returned to work only when the threat of starvation compelled them, did so with unbroken spirit. The last resolution of the meeting that called off the strike was one authorising the continuing collection of levies, to be banked for the day when further strikes would be possible. These would not be general strikes - the lesson of recent months had been learned - but attacks against single manufacturers, one by one till they had crushed them. Their only hope, said Johnson of the executive committee, was to

> send the mass back to work so that they could fall back on some single firm, and beat them one by one until they had again attained their position ... If they, in the first place, brought all their energies to bear upon the Malakhoff, they would bring that mighty fortress and its proprietors to the ground (Cheers).(1)

Thomas Read added that

> for the present, the weavers simply resumed work under a flag of truce; and it was still their intention to adopt a guerrilla style of warfare, and fight the manufacturers one by one - and seeing that Mr. Hart was the principal author of the present state of things, they would take him first.(2)

Thus when the strike ended levies of 3d. a week were contributed to the new strike fund by those weavers in work. But these amounted, in the autumn of 1860, to only one quarter of the weavers in the city. A relief fund was essential to prevent mass starvation of the unemployed. A public meeting to raise one was convened at the

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(1) Coventry Standard, 31 August 1860.

(2) loc. cit.

end of September. The mayor took the chair, but very few influential citizens were present; A.H. Pears was the only manufacturer who attended. St. Mary's Hall was crowded with unemployed weavers. They were told frankly by the mayor and Charles Bray that the manufacturers and rich inhabitants of the city had said that they would only contribute to the relief fund when they were sure that the weavers had ceased collecting for a strike. Thomas Read bitterly pointed out that the factory masters would not permit the collection of levies, and that very little had been collected from the outdoor weavers, or could be in present circumstances. But on the question of principle, he exclaimed that

> if the sympathy of the gentry of Coventry was to be withheld because the weavers would not sacrifice a principle, he was sure he was only speaking the sentiments of his fellow workmen when he said they might keep their sympathy and the weavers would keep their association (cheers).(1)

But A.H. Pears, though he regretted the attitude of his brother manufacturers and felt that only a callous heart could deny food to the starving, whatever the quarrels between rich and poor, thought that in common prudence the weavers ought to yield. The meeting closed on the understanding that the collection of levies would cease.(2) A few weeks later Read argued at a large meeting of weavers that 'his opinion was that no manufacturer had a right to buy, nor any weaver had the right to sell, his labour at any price he pleased, any more than he (Mr. Read) had the right to enter one of the park gardens and help himself to anything growing therein'.(3) But, he hastened to add, he hoped his words would not damage the collections for the relief fund. George Gilbert moved a resolution calling for the reimposition of the list of prices: an empty gesture, but still likely to give offence to the affluent upon whom the weavers had now to rely for bread. The resolution was withdrawn after pressure from the other weavers' leaders present.(4)

In the ten years that followed the strike the weavers were utterly powerless to affect the price of their labour. The surplus of weavers was so great that piece-work rates and weekly wages for those fortunate enough to have work tumbled to levels unknown since

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(1) ibid., 28 September 1860.

(2) Coventry Standard, and Coventry Herald, 28 September 1860.

(3) Coventry Standard, 30 November 1860.

(4) loc. cit.

the years after the French wars. Prices for a half-length of ribbon - one week's work for a loom - were cut by forty per cent or so, leaving the first-hand, after paying for warping, filling and 'turning-power', between 4s.6d. and 6s.6d. per week from each loom instead of 10s.6d. or more. Factory hands were even worse off. Early in 1863 W. Spencer's factory weavers were paid between 3s.1d. and 5s.11d. for a full week's work, by weekly wages, and those of Iliffe, Peters and Hamer between 3s.11d. and 6s.3d. per week; they were paid by piece-work rates - considerably lower than the old list prices, which three years before had given them average earnings of £1 a week. The firm even refused to offer a uniform scale for their weavers and 'wished by the free trade principle, to make a separate bargain with each weaver, instead of adhering to a uniform price'. Such dealings were typical.(1)

The masters, said Henry Browett in January 1861, were determined not to return to a list of prices - at whatever level it was set. 'Free Trade, and a return to any system of protection whatever, are incompatible.'(2) A few weeks later a deputation from the weavers' association met one from the manufacturers and agreed to set up a Board of Conciliation and Arbitration for the trade - a variant of the plan advocated by Widdrington at the end of the strike and currently supported (though in different senses) by Charles Bray and George Hall, a weaver; Bray wished the board to be a 'talking safety-valve' - a place where mutual antagonisms could be safely discharged and where, by the use of rational argument, the masters could convince the weavers that their interests were really in harmony and that both sides must combine to beat foreign competition. (3) George Hall's idea was that the board should be a truly

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(1) Coventry Standard, 30 November 1860, 22 March 1861, 30 January, 6 February 1863.

(2) Coventry Standard, 4 January 1861.

(3) Charles Bray, An Essay upon Councils of Conciliation and Boards of Arbitration, (Coventry, 1861), pp. 9 et seq. Bray argued that membership of the board should be voluntary but that it would be an invaluable forum for the discussion of those disagreements which became magnified in the minds of both masters and men for the want of a common meeting-place: 'an antagonistic position is assumed on both sides, which a little friendly discussion together would often prevent'. Bray believed too that the board should not have the power to decide wage-rates and that the health of the trade demanded that each master should pay what he thought fit. It might be, though, that in its discussions the board would gradually evolve a list of prices which 'many of its members and public opinion might recognise, and which, therefore, would be, to a certain desirable extent, binding'.

arbitral body - that it should decide upon a minimum list of prices and enforce it.(1) The weavers' deputation followed Hall's vision of the board's function, the manufacturers, Bray's. When the two sides met in February 1861 the manufacturers were adamant in refusing to accept that it should fix a list. Thomas Robinson, speaking for the manufacturers, said 'The prices of labour on the continent varied as much as 200 or 300 per cent between a good and a bad time of trade; when labour was in demand it obtained its own remuneration, and when not in demand it had to submit to a reduction'.(2) The same principle had to apply in Coventry. The two sides met a few times in the spring of 1861, but not to any real purpose.(3) District meetings of the weavers' association attacked the 'free trade in labour principle' which was 'gradually and unnecessarily reducing the whole weaving population to beggary and starvation'.(4) Their protests had no effect; nor did those of the general meeting of the association the following April, 1862. Thereafter the association seems to have ceased to meet.(5)

There was one overwhelming reason for the slump, the surplus of labour, and the collapse of earnings - continental competition. Fashions continued to be unfavourable to silk ribbons; velvets and feathers were preferred. The price of silk rose again in the early 1860s because of the war in China, the failure of the European silkworm crop and the partial failure of the Indian. The Morrill tariff enacted by the United States in 1861 aggravated matters because it effectively excluded continental ribbons from the American market and caused the French and Swiss to rush for the British open door. But, as protectionists in Coventry pointed out, if the tariff had not been so summarily removed they would not have found it possible to introduce their cheaper ribbons - competing with Coventry's staple production - into the British market, at least in such quantities. In 1859 479,106 lbs of continental ribbons were imported, in 1860 530,796 lbs, and in 1861 854,223 lbs. The following year 793,209 lbs

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(1) George Hall, Prize Essay on the most Advisable Mode of Establishing A Board of Conciliation and Arbitration with a view to Prevent Strikes ... (Coventry, 1861).

(2) Coventry Standard, 15 February 1861.

(3) ibid., 8 February, 15 February 1861. P.P.: [2854] H.C. (1861) xxii: Reports of the Inspectors of Factories, for the Half-year ending 30 April 1861, p. 41.

(4) Coventry Standard, 18 October 1861.

(5) ibid., 21 February, 18 April 1862.

were imported and the quantity stayed at about this level thereafter. In the eight years before the Cobden-Chevalier treaty 1,573,030 lbs of ribbon were imported, and, from 1861 to 1868 5,618,852 lbs; only negligible quantities were re-exported. As the Coventry Standard pointed out - dismissing the argument that a change of fashion was responsible for the slump - the extra imports could, if woven in Coventry, have kept the a-la-bar looms of the city in continuous employment.(1)

'A Working Man and a Freeman' wrote in 1861 of his plan to hold a conservative festival in the city to denounce free trade:

> Let a dinner be provided, and let the Earl of Derby, Messrs. Newdegate, Spooner and other influential members of the House of Lords and House of Commons of the Conservative interest be invited on this occasion. Most likely the Volunteer Corps will give us the use of their band, and our respected Vicar allow the bells of St. Michael's to give us a merry peal, and all the working class will unite and the gentlemen and farmers round will come, and let us have a thorough Conservative demonstration. We are bound down by the chain of Radical, Liberal, and Whig-Radical tyranny and oppression, and thousands throughout the country are starving through liberal legislation.(2)

The writer seems to have been a Tory. Stronger proof of the attitude of weavers came from 'An Elector' a few months later.

> It is fearful to see the downcast looks, the averted faces of 100s of hard-working men, who, a few years ago, I used to meet with cheerful looks and manly bearing, proud to have done their week's work, and to take their wages home to their wives and little ones ... Nine out of every ten tell one plainly when asked the question, that the French treaty has been the cause of it; and I don't see how, as reasonable men, they could come to any other conclusion. To force the English mechanic into competition with the foreigner, who can live and be comfortable on half the money it takes an Englishman to live upon, was the height of wickedness and folly, and the government that perpetrates such a crime deserves the execration of every honest man.(3)

The effects of the treaty upon the feelings of the electorate were shown at the bye-election that followed the death of Ellice in 1863. Morgan Treherne, who as Morgan Thomas had been so unsuccessful in his first attempt to win a seat in Coventry in 1837, defeated his liberal opponent now, because of his hostility to the treaty. Another conservative, Eaton, was elected at the bye-election in 1865; and

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(1) Coventry Standard, 24 May 1861, 7 March, 31 October 1862, 20 February 1863. C.W.C.: Pamphlets Collection, Speeches of H.W. Eaton, M.P, and A.S. Hill, M.P, in the House of Commons 18 June 1869 ... Commercial Treaty with France of 1860 (Coventry, 1869), p. 13. P.P.: [3206] H.C. (1863) xviii: Reports of Inspectors of Factories for the Half-year ending 30 April 1863, p. 41; [3473] H.C. (1865) xx: Reports ... Half-year ending 31 October 1864, p. 37.

(2) Coventry Standard, 22 March 1861.

(3) ibid., 31 May 1861.

both Eaton and Treherne were returned at the general election a few months later.(1)

More than sixty years after the distress that followed the French treaty one aged Coventrian could recall the 'absolute despair' of the city when he was twelve or fourteen. 'Hungry men sauntered aimlessly about the streets ... The pinched faces of the women told their own tale, while the pathetic march of ragged children with their cans to the soup kitchens spoke volumes. ... The weaving trade was in a "galloping consumption".'(2) In the first winter of the slump, out of 21,232 workers in the ribbon trade in Warwickshire, only 5,875 were in work - for the low earnings mentioned earlier; the rest were totally unemployed.(3) In Bedworth, for example, with a population of 3000, 1264 adult weavers (out of 1383) were totally unemployed, with no prospect of work, while 100 were earning between 3s. and 6s. a week for 3 days' work. 'There are more than 1500 souls in this parish bordering on starvation.'(4) At the end of November the number of adult ribbon weavers in Coventry had fallen from 9,854 to 8,742 since February, but only 2169 were in employment. (5) Eighteen months later seven large Coventry factories that normally employed over 900, were completely idle; others were on slack time.(6)

From the summer of 1860 onwards, weavers withdrew the deposits which in happier days they had made in Coventry Savings Bank, and sold up their furniture, bedding and clothes, and even, in the extremity of distress, their looms: a desperate measure indeed, since they sold for only £5 or £10 an a-la-bar loom that a few years before they had paid £50 for. 'To part with it would be like severing the last strand of the cable, which yet affords security against utter shipwreck, and is the sole hope the man has of ever retrieving his former respectable position.'(7) Many were given statutory poor

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(1) T.W. Whitley, The Parliamentary Representation of the City of Coventry (Coventry, 1894), pp. 339 et seq.

(2) C.W.C.: E.W. Cooper, 'Sixty Years Reminiscences: The Autobiography of a Cycle Trade Pioneer' (TS, 1928), pp. 3 et seq.

(3) Coventry Standard, 22 February 1861.

(4) ibid., 7 December 1860.

(5) Coventry Standard, 22 November 1861.

(6) P.P.: [3206] H.C. (1863) xviii, p. 42.

(7) Coventry Herald, 21 December 1860. Coventry Standard, 30 November, 4 December 1860, 22 March 1861. P.P.: [2765] H.C. (1861) xxii, pp. 42 et seq; [2854] H.C. (1861) xxii, pp. 37 et seq.

relief; the numbers on outdoor relief in the united parishes rose from 310 in September 1859, to 837 a year later, to 1228 in March 1861, to 2540 in September 1861.(1) It was of course a regulation of the Poor Law Board that outdoor relief should only be given to the able-bodied in return for the labour-test at poor law premises. The city and county magistrates thought it absurd that this test should be insisted on when the entire absence of work was so evident, and when weavers would be employed uselessly picking oakum for which there was little demand. A.H. Pears wrote on their behalf to the Poor Law Board to request a relaxation of the rules. The board refused:

> In the opinion of the Board the difficulties of the present emergency cannot fail to be augmented if a system is established of administering relief to able-bodied men unaccompanied by a task of work or other test of destitution ... and by the offer of indoor relief in such cases as may appear to require the application of a more certain test of destitution than that which outdoor employment affords, the Guardians will be enabled to relieve all cases which really require it, without losing sight of the interests of the ratepayers.(2)

An idle factory was hired to provide premises where destitute weavers could pick coconut fibre for bedding as a labour-test. Later, a shed where they could pick oakum was specially erected.(3)

Many of the weavers reduced to penury, said A.H. Pears in December 1860,

> held respectable positions among their fellow men, and had been in the habit of having many social comforts around them. They were now in necessity and very great distress, having parted with all their domestic furniture and clothing; but they cannot and will not bring their minds to have the appearance of public beggars. He sympathised much with that class; many of them were in respectable positions, men of education, and necessarily meh of some refinement. He hoped great regard would be had to their feelings.(4)

S.H. Widdrington thought that the loss of self-respect that might be suffered by such men, as a consequence of being dependent upon some form of charity, particularly terrible for them, and told of one weaver who

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(1) See Appendix I, Table II.

(2) P.R.O.: M.H. 12/13882, Secretary of the Poor Law Board to A.H. Pears, 26 November 1860. The directors of the poor in Coventry strongly approved of the Poor Law Board's decision: ibid., W.W. Harris to Poor Law Board, 29 November 1860.

(3) ibid., W.W. Harris to Poor Law Board, 17 November 1860, 15 May 1861.

(4) Coventry Standard, 14 December 1860. Joseph Gutteridge refused to apply for parochial relief after his 'little capital saved during more prosperous times' was exhausted. Lights and Shadows, pp. 151 et seq.

> never made any complaints - never let his case be known, but sold article after article to sustain himself, for his pride - perhaps in this instance very blameable - would not let him become a beggar, and at length he died of starvation ... He knew of one case where a father and a mother denied themselves a dinner altogether for the sake of giving food to their children, and yet two of the children died of what was called consumption, but what was really starvation.(1)

It was partly to assist those who refused to accept statutory relief, and partly to supplement more generally a poor law system that would have been overwhelmed by the task of feeding many thousands, that relief funds were organised. In the autumn of 1860 a large-scale city or national relief fund was at first not opened - while the city establishment was not quite sure whether or not the weavers would continue to raise strike levies. So in October the Anglican clergy and the magistrates decided that in default of a wider organisation relief would be arranged by parochial committees in St. Michael's and Holy Trinity. In October and November the benevolent distributed food to the most distressed, taking care to separate the respectable poor impoverished by the slump from 'ordinary cases of mendicity'.(2) But by the end of November it was increasingly obvious that the parochial committees had too few workers and not enough money to cope; their counterparts were even less adequate in the northern weaving districts of the county. It was also by then obvious, it seems, that further strikes were not in prospect. Lord Leigh, the most important nobleman in the county - though he usually had little to do with north Warwickshire - opened a national appeal fund at the end of November, with advertisements in all newspapers. 'All local efforts to alleviate the increasing distress seem inadequate. The better and more respectable class of artisans are enduring privations of the most aggravated character.'(3) Leigh worked very hard in the years that followed; his most active supporters were S.H. Widdrington and A.H. Pears. Even now, very few manufacturers came forward to help. They were embittered, though it should be added that many of them were in deep financial trouble and some went bankrupt: that unenviable state, however, was rather less distressing

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(1) Coventry Herald, 28 December 1860. See also Coventry Standard, loc. cit.

(2) Coventry Standard, 5 October, 12 October, 19 October, 2 November, 23 November, 30 November, 7 December 1860.

(3) ibid., 30 November 1860.

than the plight of the impoverished weavers of Hillfields.(1) £41,665 14s.6d. were raised, of course for north Warwickshire as a whole, from a national - indeed international - public. £150 came from the Queen, £400 from Cheltenham, £3 from the crew of H.M.S. Hecla, 1s. from a domestic servant in York; collections came from national schools all over Britain, and a contribution arrived from a French noblewoman long resident in Constantinople.

The money was not spent prodigally. Scale maxima were set, of 1s.6d. a week for all over twelve years of age and 9d. a week for children - amounts fixed deliberately below those available in outdoor relief with a labour-test from the poor law authorities, to discourage as many as possible from going on to the fund. Earnings of a few shillings a week could be supplemented from the relief fund up to the scale maxima. But for nobody was relief automatic. A dense network of committees visited all recipients to make sure that the idle and vicious were not taking advantage of public generosity; even the obviously respectable were subjected to close scrutiny. 'It was very important not to let applicants get the notion that they were entitled to that amount', said the Rev. W. Drake.(2) A.H. Pears pleaded that since a vast number of the distressed felt affronts to their human dignity very keenly, the relief should be given in money. But in fact it was given, the better to prevent fraud, in the form of tickets exchangeable at grocers' shops. Money was given only to improve looms in ways thought to fit them to meet continental competition, or to pay the fares of emigrants, or in return for labour on the city's commons; from the end of 1860 onwards these were cleared, levelled and drained by gangs of weavers, who earned 1s. a day, for three days a week, to supplement their grocery tickets.(3) All those supported by the relief fund, or receiving outdoor relief from the statutory poor law, in addition were given gifts of coal,

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(1) The number of large manufacturers sank from 57 in 1860 to 20 in 1864. P.P.: [3473] H.C. (1865) xx, p. 38. One of the bankrupts was John Day, the factory proprietor, who in April 1861 had liabilities of £20,700 and assets of £13,000; he had been forced to sell off his stock of ribbon at a loss of £5,000 at the end of 1860. But in the first four months of 1861 Day spent £505 7s.6d. on supporting his family. Coventry Standard, 19 April, 26 April 1861.

(2) Coventry Standard, 14 December 1860.

(3) The relief fund committee first proposed that able-bodied weavers who worked on the commons should be paid 1s. a day from the fund but relieved in addition by the directors of the poor. The directors, supported by the poor law inspectors, refused, apparently on the grounds that a labour-test had to be conducted on the board's own premises. P.R.O.: M.H. 12/13882, W.W. Harris to Robert Weale, 3 January 1861, Weale to Harris, 4 January 1861.

meat and clothing - this last from a pile of garments assembled by Lady Leigh.

But despite the frugal dispensation of relief £29,000 were spent, leaving only £11,000, by March 1861. The screws were then tightened. The ticket system was dropped, and all who wanted relief had to apply for doles of bread and soup at St. Mary's Hall and F. Browett's factory in Raglan Street. As weavers pointed out, a dish of soup was cold by the time the collector had trudged home a mile with it; they asked for 6d. a head per week for food and argued that anyone so degraded as to spend relief money on drink and tobacco would sell food to buy them.(1) These complaints went unheeded. Over 14,000 were dependent on the fund in February 1862. Soon it was totally exhausted. In the autumn another appeal was launched for the winter; over £11,800 was raised, again for the entire weaving area; this too was spent by the spring of 1863.(2)

By that time many had left Coventry. Emigration started soon after the strike. Many left for the cotton districts of Lancashire, their fares paid in some cases from the relief fund. In the first two years several hundred emigrated overseas, with aid from the relief fund committee; many others went without such assistance. Organised emigration on a large scale began early in 1862, when the conviction grew that there was so little hope for the ribbon trade that all who could were best counselled to flee the city. Widdrington lectured on the prospects of overseas emigration in February in St. Mary's Hall. Many hundreds arrived long before he began to speak; many 1000s went away rather than suffer the press of people. When Widdrington arrived

> men were standing and sitting on each other's shoulders, until masses of human beings were piled up eight or ten feet high from the floor. Once or twice, those underneath, unable to sustain the great burden on them, gave way, and down fell the whole pile in pell-mell confusion.

The atmosphere in the hall was suffocating and Widdrington brought the audience to St. Michael's for greater comfort.(3) Concurrently, Lord Leigh opened a special fund to pay part of the cost of emigration for weavers - who were warned by the Queensland Emigration Commissioner

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(1) See the letter of 'One who Knows', Coventry Standard, 6 December 1861.

(2) Coventry Herald, 28 December 1860. Coventry Standard, 14 December 1860, 4 January, 22 March, 12 July, 15 November, 6 December 1861, 7 February, 14 February, 14 March, 11 April, 21 November, 12 December 1862, 2 January, 20 February, 8 May, 15 May 1863. P.P.: [2854] H.C. (1861) xxii, p. 38.

(3) Coventry Free Press, 7 February 1862.

that they (unlike carpenters and female domestic servants) could not obtain government-assisted passages. By April £1300 had been subscribed to Leigh's fund. There followed the dismal liturgy of emigration: the valedictory services for emigrants at Holy Trinity and St. Michael's, the chartered trains to Liverpool and Greenwich, the official farewells from Lord Leigh and A.H. Pears at the quayside. Many weavers took their trade to Paterson, the silk town in New Jersey. One Nuneaton weaver found his way into the Confederate army in Alabama. Many went to farm in Canada, Australia and New Zealand. One group of nonconformists settled together in Albertland, in the province of Auckland; pathetically, they took stores of ribbon out with them but found that market glutted too, though one who took £15 worth of silk bootlaces sold them at a three-fold gain and others sold elastic profitably. They stayed to farm; one complained of the 'hills of greasy clay, much longer and steeper than Hill Top' and found Auckland a sad metropolis after Coventry, since it was only the size of Nuneaton and supported only two newspapers. But he added, New Zealand had a more glorious future than Hillfields.(1) Others too wrote of homesickness, heat, drought and an unfamiliar pattern of life. But others were happy immediately. One wrote from Brisbane: 'I was never in better health and circumstances than at the present time ... Since I have been in the colony I have never seen but three or four snakes and about half a dozen blacks, but they are all as tame as doves ... As for the country, it is like Stoneleigh Park.'(2) To different fortunes 4,000, it was calculated, left Coventry by the end of 1862. Many more were anxious to leave: 'thousands of poor operatives are languishing under the sickness of hopes deferred'.(3) Some idea of the number who left the city - indeed the entire weaving area - may be gained from the fact that between 1861 and 1871 the population of Coventry fell from 40,936 to 39,474, despite the natural increase of the decade; the population of the other weaving parishes fell too.(4) The city was to hear

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(1) C.W.C.: Pamphlets Collection: Joseph Wilkins, Emigration. News from New Zealand by an Emigrant from Coventry, (Coventry, 1863), pp. 3 et seq.

(2) Coventry Standard, 20 February 1863.

(3) ibid., 19 December 1862.

(4) See Chapter One, Section IV, Table I. For this section, see, besides the references given, Coventry Standard, 14 December 1860, 12 July, 13 September, 8 November 1861, 31 January, 21 February, 4 April, 11 April, 18 April, 23 May, 19 September, 28 November 1862, 30 January, 3 February, 20 March, 3 April 1863. See also Joseph Gutteridge, Lights and Shadows, p. 203.

from the emigrants' grandchildren in 1940, when many hundreds with distant roots in Coventry sent telegrams and letters of sympathy after its devastation by the Germans.(1)

By the mid-1860s the worst of the slump was over. The city had been quick to adopt new trades. Looms were adapted to weave coach lace, elastic web and muslin frilling early in 1861. Cotton spinning (in the mill that Widdrington had first projected in 1860) and worsted weaving followed it. Within the ribbon trade itself there was some improvement after the early 1860s. Thomas Stevens began in 1862 the weaving of book-marks and other kinds of silk ribbon that illustrated notable scenes and men from national and local life. These were a very popular and rapidly growing branch of the ribbon trade. But Stevens employed comparatively few weavers. More important than his invention was the establishing by the trade at large of a sort of equilibrium in its struggle against continental competition: but only at the cost of earnings much lower than in the late 1850s and an apparently permanent pool of unemployed weavers - despite emigration - for whom the workhouse was enlarged in 1863. The steam was disconnected from many ribbon factories. The slump lasted until 1870, when the Franco-Prussian war and the disruption of continental exports that resulted led to a boom in Coventry ribbons: wages rose by twenty-five per cent. But the boom was short-lived and stagnation followed the coming of peace; the long-term demand for silk ribbons, wherever they were made, was in decline. A further blow to prosperity came in 1890, when the fashions turned suddenly against ribbon, prices fell by fifty per cent, hundreds of weavers were destitute, and it was reckoned to be the worst time since thousands had been impoverished thirty years before. Another relief fund was organised.(3) The ribbon trade continued to decline rapidly and by 1908, it was written that

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(1) Frederick Smith, Coventry. Six Hundred Years of Municipal Life (Coventry, 1945), p. 145.

(2) P.P.: [2854] H.C. (1861) xxii, p. 34; [3206] H.C. (1863) xviii, p. 41; [3473] H.C. (1865) xx, pp. 38 et seq; [3794] H.C. (1867) xvi: Reports of Inspectors of Factories for the Half-year ending 31 October 1866, pp. 73 et seq; [3914] H.C. (1867) xvi: Reports ... ending 30 April 1867, p. 24; [C.446] H.C. (1871) xiv: Reports ... ending 30 April 1871, pp. 67 et seq. Coventry Standard, 21 February, 20 June 1862, 20 March 1863.

(3) Joseph Gutteridge, Lights and Shadows, pp. 236, 264 et seq.

> a striking commentary is afforded by a walk through the streets of Coventry, Bedworth, and Nuneaton. Row after row of houses in these streets still retain as sole memorial of better days the top room once specially adapted in every household for the 'weaving-room', the walls being practically made of glass. The remnants of the ribbon-weaving trade now concentrate in a few large factories, neck-ties and hat-bands being the chief articles manufactured.(1)

But the weaving of silk ribbon continued on a minor scale for a long time. Petersham ribbon or 'pads' were still being woven in Foleshill in 1938.(2) In 1942 one aged engine-loom weaver was still making black silk ribbon in his topshop in Bulkington(3); he appears to have been the last to practise the craft as Richard Hartopp, Edward Goode and Thomas Read knew it. J and J. Cash of course still survive in Kingfield, in the cottage factories they built in the 1850s, now turned into a conventional factory. They make a variety of textile small-wares, related to ribbons but usually not very closely and only rarely made of silk: name-tapes, masonic regalia and woven labels. Many of these, however, are made on jacquard looms: Coventry has yet a few links with its ancient past - a few emblems of antiquity from before the time it became the British Detroit.

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(1) V.C.H. Warwickshire, ii, p. 263.

(2) I am grateful to Mr. B.S. Jacques of Station Road, Foleshill for this information.

(3) I am grateful to Mr. W.G. Wyman of Bulkington for this information.

CHAPTER TWELVE

RETROSPECT AND COMPARISON: TRADITIONALISM AND CONFLICT

I

From the 1820s to the 1850s Coventry was in many ways a curiously static city. From the beginning of the period to the end, the most prominent members of the civic community were the same men - Charles Bray, George Eld, Edward Goode, Benjamin Poole, William Taunton, Sibley Whittem, William Wilmot. The weaving of silk ribbons was the predominant trade, almost one quarter of the city's entire population being directly engaged in it in the 1820s and over one quarter in the 1850s. The prevailing system of production throughout the period was outwork - the weaving of ribbons by small groups (often family groups) in domestic workshops, on looms owned or hired by master journeymen, the 'first-hands'. Thus out of 4,600 looms in Coventry in the late 1830s about 4,000 were owned or hired by over 1800 first-hands (the other looms being in loom-shops); and of these 4000 about 3150 were worked by the first-hands themselves, or their wives, children or indoor apprentices, the others being worked by journeyhands. From the eighteenth century onwards the traditional means of calculating the piece-work payments of weavers was the 'list of prices' - a standard list of rates. It was always intensely threatened by the perennial problem of a surplus of labour: felt each autumn and winter (even at good times) and less regularly when deeper and longer slumps undercut the trade.

A succession of such disasters struck between 1815 and 1835; the list was reduced more greatly than commodity prices fell, and more importantly, the list itself was often abandoned. In real terms earnings dropped by the list; without the list (as often in these twenty years) they fell greatly. Nevertheless, at the bottom of the drop in list prices, in the late 1830s, Coventry weavers still earned quite high wages, when in full work. In the engine trade for plain ribbons journeyhands earned 9s.6d. a week; in the jacquard engine trade for fancy ribbons they earned 1s. more. There were about 1200 such weavers. They were outnumbered by 1800 first-hands who earned more. Those 700 first-hands who owned one loom earned on it 10s.6d. a week net in the plain engine branch and 13s.6d. in the jacquard engine. 1100 first-hands (almost equalling, therefore, the number of loom-less journeyhands) owned two or more looms, their looms totalling 3200 altogether. Of these looms about 2450(1) were worked by them or members of their households. So a typical weaver, a plain engine first-hand with two looms worked by his family, earned 21s. a week, and one with three 31s.6d. These earnings were of course for those at full work at standard piece-work rates. The jacquard branch did not in fact have a list after 1833, because of competition from looms outside the city and the difficulty of striking a common list in a branch with vast variations in skill. But the earnings quoted of jacquard weavers appear to have been usual in the period after 1835. In the plain branch the list of 1835 was certainly the standard thereafter; the list was not altered. After 1835 these standard prices were still departed from in times of slump that made many weavers unemployed and others willing to accept work below the list; the early 1840s were an especially bad time. But such crises certainly occupied a far smaller proportion of the twenty-four years after 1835 than of the twenty before it, and standard prices were departed from much less.

In real terms the earnings of the weavers paid by these standard prices fluctuated with commodity prices in the period after 1835. Only between 1848 and 1852 did prices fall appreciably below the level of 1835; in other years they equalled it, or were above, and so there was no permanent gain in real terms for those with the earnings quoted above. Very importantly, however, both before 1835

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(1) I have arrived at this figure by subtracting from the total of first-hands' looms worked by them or their families, 3145, the number of looms possessed by first-hands who had only one loom each - 693. See Chapter Five, section I, and Table VI.

when in real terms earnings steadily fell, and after 1835 when they more often fell or remained static than rose, technological development increased the earning power of many weavers (provided, of course, they were in full work) quite dramatically, both in money terms and real terms. In the earlier period the number of single-hand looms fell, and the number of the far more efficient and productive engine looms rose, in each case greatly. In the later period (especially in the 1850s) steam looms in factories became increasingly common, and in competition with them large numbers of more productive looms were installed in the outwork branch. The earnings of both factory hands and outdoor weavers on these new looms were markedly higher than on the old.(1)

As complaints from manufacturers from Lancashire and Essex in the 1820s had made clear, Coventry had been slow to adopt the steam loom and the factory, and there were still more looms in the outdoor branch than the factory branch in the late 1850s.(2) Change in the Coventry ribbon trade was much less marked than that in the industry with which it was often compared (to Coventry's disadvantage) and which spokesmen in the city were wont to attack in a mixture of hatred, envy and fear - the Lancashire cotton industry. Coventry experienced nothing comparable to the widespread and rapid introduction of the power loom and the weaving mill in Lancashire between 1820 and 1850, and the simultaneous and equally fast decline in the number of handloom weavers and in the outwork system:(3) technological development that was largely responsible for Manchester's role as a 'shock city' of Victorian England, 'the symbol of a new age' whose clamorous modernity so excited visitors.(4) Visitors to Coventry were, by contrast, struck by what Harriet Martineau called 'tokens of antiquity' - the overwhelmingly medieval aspect of the streets, where factory chimneys of glazed brick intruded starkly into rows of black and white houses or jarred with the crumbling old red sandstone of St. Michael's spire.(5)

(1) See, for this section, Chapter Five, sections I, III and IV.

(2) See Chapter Two, section VI, and Chapter Five, section II.

(3) See Duncan Bythell, The Handloom Weavers (Cambridge, 1969), pp. 88 et seq, 263 et seq.

(4) Asa Briggs, Victorian Cities, (Penguin, 1968), pp. 88 et seq.

(5) Harriet Martineau, 'Rainbow Making', Household Words, iv (1852), pp. 488 et seq. Nathaniel Hawthorne was also struck by the ancient aspect of the city when he visited it in 1855: see Randall Stewart, ed., The English Notebooks by Nathaniel Hawthorne (London, 1941), pp. 132 et seq.

But Coventry did not merely lag behind Manchester. The change that occurred was different in quality. The most remarkable development in the Coventry ribbon trade in the 1850s was the transformation of the outwork branch - the adoption by it of larger looms, many of them powered by steam in cottage factories, so as to compete with the conventional factories then being built. This intensive improvement of the outdoor branch reveals most clearly the hatred of the majority of weavers for the conventional factory: partly because of the immoral influences therein upon females and the young, partly because it threatened so completely by its superior productive power to depreciate the value of the looms in which the first-hand master journeymen had invested so much money, and to drive into it all outworkers and then subject them to harsher work-rhythms and labour discipline than were current in outdoor topshops. Despite all investment in superior looms outdoors, the cottage was of necessity less efficient than the factory.(1) By 1859, however, the outwork system had succeeded in dominating and controlling the menace - by the use of extraordinary measures dependent upon unusual circumstance. The enforcement upon the large factory proprietors of a system of remuneration in 1858 and 1859 - piece-work rates by the list - which eroded the increment of productivity they enjoyed (as against the outwork system) succeeded because the factory operatives (who gained by high piece-work rates at the list) and the city at large supported the outdoor weavers: the great dispute of 1858 and 1859 reveals most graphically the unity and energetic self-confidence of the weaving force in support of the outdoor system of production and of measures to maintain it, and the support of the city in this aim. In 1859 the city chose to promote inefficiency - to compel higher production costs upon large factories. But the hobbling of technological advance then achieved could only survive because Coventry enjoyed an exceptional and unique protection from foreign competition.(2)

This too was characteristic of most of the period. Before 1826 the import of foreign ribbons was prohibited. Though smuggling to some extent mitigated this protection, it caused far less damage than did, for a time, the substitution of a protective tariff for prohibition in 1826: between 1828 and the early 1830s the influx of continental ribbons destroyed Coventry's place in the upper-class, fashionable market. But from about 1835 onwards the growth of a middle-class and lower-class market, stimulated by the fashion for

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(1) See Chapter Five, section II.

(2) See Chapter Six, section IV.

French goods in the upper-class market but looking for the cheaper ribbons that the tariff-protected Coventry could provide, gave an increasing opening for the Warwickshire trade. Thus, paradoxically, the 'free trade' measures of the 1820s both damaged Coventry's trade in the short term and benefited it in the long. As prosperity grew after 1835 the demand for the restoration of 'prohibition' (as before 1826) gradually waned in Coventry, though of course all Coventrians wished for the retention of the salutary degree of protection, the tariff, that still remained.(1) By the early 1840s the majority also wished for the repeal of the corn laws and saw no contradiction between their free trade views in this case and their protectionism for native industry; the attempts to link the latter to the cause of continuing agricultural protection - by at one extreme the Coventry Standard and at the other many Coventry Chartists - made little appeal. In 1846 the majority in the city was prepared to exchange a halving of the ribbon tariff for corn law repeal. The glorious benefits of corn law repeal were a vastly popular cry in the city in the early 1850s - the conservative Hubbard joining in it at the 1852 election, and even Tories like Wilmot dropping their nostalgia for agricultural protection at the same time. In the 1850s, as national purchasing power grew, the ribbon trade was more prosperous than ever before and the outwork system burgeoned, and by 1859 succeeded in trammelling the productive and competing factory system. But the vitality of old modes of production, and the prosperity of the city, were dependent upon the fifteen per cent tariff.(2)

The triumph of free trade in 1860 - the Cobden-Chevalier treaty and the removal of British protective tariffs that followed it - hit Coventry like a bombshell. The threat of foreign competition in the lower and middle-class ribbon markets that had previously been safe from it made a lowering of productive costs necessary: manufacturers and city came quickly to believe that the factory must be untrammelled, and the outwork system forced to adjust its prices to the level made necessary by the factory's competition. The weavers did not agree; the strike of 1860 followed. This disaster merely aggravated foreign competition, and made even more impossible the old nexus of the list and of civic support for it.(3)

But before the snapping of old bonds in 1860 what is most striking is the support given to the weavers' cause by the city, and

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(1) See Chapter Two, section V, and Chapter Five, section III.

(2) See Chapter Seven, sections II and V.

(3) See Chapter Eleven, sections I and II.

notably, over many years, for the list of prices. To manufacturers the preservation of a standard list of prices was of value because it prevented ruinous competition between them. But since a standard list might of course be lower than the current one, a stronger reason for their support of the latter was the desire not to have their stocks of ribbon already in hand depreciated in value. Here we have one reason for the oft-repeated statement that it was the larger manufacturers, with, naturally, fuller stock-rooms, rather than the smaller, newer masters, who were the ardent defenders of the list - men like Abijah Hill Pears and Thomas Cope, who aided the weavers to set up the Plain Ribbon Weavers' Association in 1842. Traditions of paternalism - of 'honourable' conduct towards the weaver - were plainly important too. Nothing else but benevolence can explain the willingness of thirteen masters in July 1860 (with A.H. Pears among them) to continue to pay by the list, when the great excess of labour made it possible to engage labour at rates much below it, and when a great drop in the price of ribbons on the London market had already devalued disastrously the contents of stock-rooms. But, in addition, at many times until 1860 the manufacturers were induced to support the list by the pressure of public opinion. Throughout the period this pressure came from many quarters, for a variety of motives, appealed to repeatedly by the weavers, with a medley of arguments: the importance for the city's general prosperity of maintaining the flow of weavers' wages at a high level, and the claims of decency, benevolence and kindly regard for the artisan. These arguments affected the corporation. The unreformed corporation was as paternalist as it was Tory - a keen defender of the list. The Toryism disappeared when the corporation was reformed in 1836, but the paternalist tradition survived and was evident at crucial moments. In 1842 the chief constable intervened with the manufacturers, urging them with success to pay by the list; in 1858 the mayor intervened at the start of the dispute with the factory masters and urged the Ratliffs to agree to pay by piece-work rates, at the list, as the weavers wished. The arguments were accepted too by shopkeepers and other citizens and (besides the two radical journals) the liberal and Tory newspapers, the Herald and the Standard.

From 1815 to 1858 twenty-four major disputes over the lists of prices in the plain or fancy trades or over the rate or method of remuneration in the factory branch, are recorded. The support for the weavers of one or more elements from among the honourable manufac-

turers, inhabitants, corporation and leading newspapers(1) is explicitly confirmed by the sources at all except four disputes.(2) Of the seven where the weavers failed totally two were among the four.(3) Out of seventeen disputes where they won at least partial success the weavers had the recorded support of one or more elements in the city in fifteen.(4) The weavers had cause to be grateful for the city's support for their systems of remuneration.(5)

They received this support too at other times. The relief of the unemployed weaver by formal and informal means, through the rate-borne system and by distress funds, was lavish before 1830. Afterwards statutory poor relief became steadily less generous, partly because the affluent citizens who controlled Coventry's poor law system grew themselves more frugal, and partly because after the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 a more niggardly standard of provision was increasingly imposed on them, by informal pressure from central authority. Nevertheless, it is significant that while Coventry retained its independence from the control of the Poor Law Commission, under its local act, its provision of poor relief was considered too lavish by the poor law inspectors - notably in respect of outdoor relief. Relief became markedly less generous after the act of 1844 absorbed Coventry into the national pattern.(6) Distress funds too were less generously subscribed after 1830 than before it: though they fluctuated with the gravity of distress and, perhaps even more, with the city's appreciation of the social results of parsimony: revealingly, the second largest fund, after the £3,300 raised in 1817, was the £1352 collected in 1842, the Chartist year. Only a diminution of benevolence and of prudential generosity can explain the fact that the fund of 1857 - a year of great distress, if we judge by the poor law figures - reached less than half the amount of 1842.

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(1) That is, the Herald and the Standard, the organs of the city's establishment. In addition, of course, the radical Free Press and Weekly Times always supported the weavers' cause.

(2) The disputes in the outdoor trade in 1830, and in the factory branch in 1853, 1856 and 1857.

(3) The two in question were the disputes of 1830 and 1857.

(4) The other two were the disputes in the factory branch in 1853 and 1856, the latter with the Cash brothers.

(5) The twenty-four disputes and the civic support for them mentioned in this section are detailed in Chapter Two, sections II, IV and V, Chapter Three, section III, Chapter Six, sections II, III, and IV, and Chapter Ten, sections I and II.

(6) See Chapter Nine, section I.

But as private generosity and statutory poor relief waned, so grew the relative value for the relief of distress of the city's eleemosynary charities. These amounted to over £2,000 a year in the 1850s - a growing proportion of the funds available for the unemployed. The city showed its appreciation of the function of the formal charities in the structure of paternalism by its united, intense (and in the event) victorious opposition to the Charity Commission's scheme of 1856, which proposed to appropriate the alms charities and transfer the bulk to educational purposes and the Coventry and Warwickshire hospital.(1) But it would not suffice to argue that the city was cynically transferring from its own pocket to the formal charities the responsibility of relieving the unemployed, and to judge from this that civic support for the weavers was dying. The dispute of 1858 and 1859 shows that it was still vital. This dispute, it should be recalled, was not of the masters' making - but an attempt by all weavers, both outdoor and factory, to compel upon the factory masters modes of payment that would inhibit their cost-efficiency and benefit all weavers. In this dispute both the Standard and the Herald turned against the weavers - after having for so long supported their claims to the list of prices - yet the tradition of civic support was still strong. As already mentioned, the mayor intervened on the weavers' side. And above all, more than £1,000 were subscribed by the inhabitants of the city to sustain the factory weavers in the lockout that their masters, in their intransigence, resorted to.(2)

During the long battle for the full restoration of the outdoor list in 1858, Thomas Maclean addressed a meeting of weavers on Greyfriars Green in words which express in a most intense way the pride and self-confidence of the outdoor weavers.

> They had met again upon that spot which he called sacred. Upon that spot they had often contended for liberty and right; the name of that spot was known far and wide, and what had been done there had been felt in the Commons House of Parliament; and there they would meet and meet again, until the Smiths and all their kidney were brought up to the righteous standard of the list. (Cheers) (3)

He was careful to add praise of the honourable manufacturers, whose disapproval of the list-breakers was as great as theirs, and warnings to behave peacefully so as to keep the support of the magistrates and

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(1) See Chapter Eight, section II, and Chapter Nine, section II.

(2) See Chapter Six, section IV and Chapter Ten, sections I and II.

(3) Coventry Weekly Times, 4 August 1858.

the town. His colleagues Thomas Read and Isaac Caldicott stressed that pride in self entailed the avoidance of violence: 'they wished to appeal to man's reason and sense of justice ... Let law and order be their motto, and then, with the blessing of God upon their efforts, they should again be successful.'(1) The burden of these speeches - the justice of the weavers' case, the need to make this justice apparent by rational argument and not to obscure their case, or place in jeopardy the support of the honourable masters and the city, by the use of violence - was repeated at every dispute from 1815 onwards by the weavers' leaders. They would countenance only those peaceful rituals for publicising their case which were allowed by the city establishment - the 'donkeying' of recalcitrant masters in 1820 (which caused no physical pain and left merely a moral scar) and throughout the period those common ways of maintaining both their own morale and the support of the city - the serpentine parade through the streets and the meeting on Greyfriars Green. When - as in September 1858 - the mayor, anxious during the great lock-out for the peace of the city, forbade the use of a band and banners during a procession, the weavers' leaders left the procession because some weavers brought two banners along - and the leaders followed up their action by publicly dissociating themselves from the dissidents' action. Most notably, of course, the weavers' committee volunteered to act as special constables in the evening after the burning of Beck's mill in November 1831.

This was one of the few examples of violence to person or property committed by the weavers between 1815 and the autumn of 1858.(2) The others are the attacks on the premises and workpeople of John Day, and the house of Richard Woodcock, in 1829 and 1830,(3) the breaking of the windows of Merridew's loom-shop and the assaults on Elizabeth Liggins and her father in 1834 and 1835, the attacks on the blacklegs at the Ratliffs' factory in 1848,(4) and the similar assaults at Spencer and Horsfall's factory in 1854.(5) At all other times until the autumn of 1858 the

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(1) loc. cit. See also Chapter Six, section III.

(2) See Chapter Three, section III.

(3) See Chapter Two, sections V and VI.

(4) See Chapter Six, section II.

(5) See Chapter Six, section III.

injunctions of the weavers' committees were obeyed. The overwhelmingly peaceful nature of the weavers' actions from 1815 till the disputes with Pridmore and Lester in the autumn of 1858 are testimony to the acceptance, by the body of weavers, of their leaders' arguments. The great peacefulness of the period between 1835 and 1858 seems to reflect three related phenomena: the growing prosperity of those years, and, more importantly, the growing strength of the weavers' union organisation and the increasing acceptance by individual weavers of a general policy of militant yet peaceful pressure: since truly remarkable is the entire lack of violence during the lock-out of 1858. Technological change had compelled the outdoor weavers to attempt extraordinary measures - the crippling of the factories' superior efficiency - when failure would (the outdoor weavers thought) have fatally damaged them. Yet during the lock-out the urgency and moment of the issues at stake led no weaver to commit an act of violence. Soon after the lock-out, technological change aroused the tensions and passions which the disciplined weavers had so far held in check. Violence occurred during the dispute with Lester and Pridmore, and then, in 1859, during the fresh quarrel with James Hart. There was much more during the great strike of 1860 - despite the frequent warnings of the weavers' committee:(1) even so, how slight the illegality and violence of 1858-1860 seem when compared to the murderous 'outrages' committed by trade unionists in Sheffield a few years later, in a quite different social context.(2)

It is an index of the importance of the ribbon trade in the city that of nearly 9,000 freemen of the city enrolled between 1781 and 1860 more than 3,700 were ribbon weavers. Though an unusually large group - the only other occupational category that reached four figures was watchmakers, the second trade in the city - the ribbon weavers were in another sense typical of the freemen. In this period of 80 years only 520 freemen had been apprenticed to occupations which for want of a better term we may denominate 'middle-class'. The great majority - nearly 8,500 - had been apprenticed to artisan and shopkeeping trades: and no doubt the great majority of them stayed in these trades after enrolment despite the opportunities for upward social mobility provided by the ribbon and watch trades.(3) The freemen comprised a caste, an interest-group, with many privileges,

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(1) See Chapter Six, sections III and IV.

(2) See S. Pollard, A History of Labour in Sheffield (Liverpool, 1959).

(3) See Chapter One, section III, for Table I on the apprenticeships served by freemen, and the accompanying discussion of the status of freemen.

chiefly access to special charities, pasturing rights for cattle on the Lammas lands - or entitlement to compensation for this outmoded privilege - and the parliamentary franchise. Only in the reform bill movement of 1830 to 1832 were the majority of freemen prepared to sacrifice local and particularist advantage - in this case, the freeman franchise. Ironically, it was saved on that occasion despite their willingness to surrender it.(1) Three years later, the freemen's efforts to save it played their part in its retention.(2) Indeed, characteristic of the period was a defence by the freemen of their privileges as intense as the guarding of the list of prices by the weavers - many men, of course, like David Buckney and William Taunton, being involved simultaneously in the two struggles. Characteristic of the period too was the city's acceptance of the freemen's intransigence, or its active support for it. As a result the freemen gained, in the late 1850s, both the compensation in freehold land they had long insisted on for the extinction of their pasture right and the abandonment by the Charity Commission of its scheme for the reorganisation of the city's charities which would severely have abridged the freemen's special privileges.(3) So in the late 1850s, when the outdoor weavers showed their pride, their vigour, their self-confidence, by their union organisation, their revitalising of the outwork system, their mastery over the factory proprietors, the freemen showed the same qualities by their defence of particularist advantage: and a heightened appreciation in the city of the rewards, both moral and material, that possession of the freedom would bring is surely indicated by the fact that in the decade 1851-1860 more freemen were enrolled than in any other of the eight surveyed in Table I.

The freemen comprised the parliamentary electorate before 1832. The Great Reform Act added £10 householders to the constituency, but since the freeman franchise was preserved in 1832 (and survived several attempts to destroy it thereafter) and since the freedom of the city continued to be esteemed, vital and attractive, the greater part of the electorate consisted of freemen throughout the 1830s, 1840s and 1850s. The preponderance of artisans, shopkeepers and small employers among the freemen gave the constituency a popular character, in which, it should be noted, weavers bulked very large. In 1837 there were 3086 freemen and 576 £10 householders on the

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(1) See Chapter Three, section II.

(2) See Chapter Four, section II.

(3) See Chapter Eight, sections I and II.

register, and of the freemen more than half were weavers. 1370 of 1501 first-hand journeymen then counted were freemen electors and many more weavers, both first-hands or simple journeymen, possessed the freeman franchise too.(1) In its retention of an electorate of popular character Coventry's experience was different from that of other English boroughs, where for the most part the ancient franchises that had before 1832 created a popular electorate withered in importance thereafter. So in the 1860s it could credibly be recorded that Coventry was the most working-class constituency in the country.(2) There was, in the constituency in the 1820s and 1830s, a strong vein of populist conservatism - owing much to hostility among ribbon weavers to their masters, usually liberal. But only once was this conservatism sufficiently strong to overturn liberal control of parliamentary elections: this was in 1826, when at a time of wage-cutting in the midst of high profits many weavers hated their masters and, venting their hatred on the two liberal members, turned them out. Also, the impression of an overwhelmingly Tory mood that this election conveys is exaggerated by the use of widespread political violence by the Tory corporation. The same violence - when applied by liberals - makes it difficult to estimate the size of the Tory element at other elections: notably at the bloody mêlée of December 1832. Nevertheless, it is crucially significant that where there was no organised violence to cloud the result - merely treating, which for several reasons did so much less - the mood of the constituency was obviously liberal. Notable here were the elections of 1831 and 1833 - and all those thereafter. Only once between 1830 and 1860 was a conservative elected - G.J. Turner in 1847.(3)

Coventry was, then, predominantly a liberal constituency. It included a strong radical element throughout the period. 500 votes were cast for William Cobbett in 1820 - and since they were given despite great violence from Cobbett's opponents they were, as Cobbett said, 'real votes'. Peter Moore (one of Cobbett's opponents on this occasion) was member till 1826, and a supporter of artisans' rights and parliamentary reform and a stern critic of the French war, the Corn Laws, and the Tory policy of political repression. His emphasis on these opinions helped him to win the election of 1818.

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(1) P.P.: [217] H.C. (1840) xxiv, p. 185.

(2) See Chapter One, section III, and Chapter Four, section III.

(3) See Chapter Two, sections III and IV, and Chapter Seven.

He was succeeded in 1831 by Henry Lytton Bulwer, a supporter of the dissenters and a keen advocate of the ballot, shorter parliaments and 'cheap bread'. He was followed by William Williams from 1835 to 1847, who with his extensive programme of reform, ranging from household suffrage to the repeal of the Poor Law Amendment Act, was the most radical member Coventry ever possessed. He was followed in the 1850s by Geach and Paxton, for both of whom the gaining of household suffrage was the chief item in their radical creed.

These radicals had as their fellow-member another liberal, Edward Ellice. When he first stood in 1818, allied with Peter Moore, he was a critic of the corn laws and the current political repression and an advocate of parliamentary reform. These were radical opinions for the day. A generation later Ellice was less of a radical. Henceforth, 'Whig' seems the most appropriate term for him.(1) In the early 1830s he was a member of Grey's government, one of the architects of the Great Reform Act, and a staunch opponent of any more extensive change than was indicated by his hostility to the corn laws and his respect for 'the principles of civil and religious liberty'. His support for the Whig measures after 1832 disgusted Coventry radicals. They brought Williams forward in opposition to him in 1835 and at first Williams planned to ask for plumper votes merely. In fact, at that election and the three that followed, Williams's supporters accepted the logic dictated by the nature of the Coventry electorate. A disjunction and dispersion of the liberal vote would risk the defeat of at least one of the liberals and the return of a Tory. An electoral coalition between Whig (or 'old blue') and radical forces was necessary and was concluded. One local radical believed that the total of votes that a radical candidate standing on his own could command in Coventry was 400 merely, and gave the need for a pact with the old blues as the reason for radical hostility to John Bell when he insisted on standing in 1837. Bell, a Chartist one year later, and more radical than Williams, criticised 'shopocracy' and aristocracy and 'our present infamous representative and commercial systems'.(2) He received 44 votes merely.

Radical and Elliceite forces in the city appear to have been more or less equal in the 1830s and 1840s. The repeal of the corn

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(1) He is so treated by Donald Southgate, The Passing of the Whigs, (London, 1962), pp. 10 et seq - though only briefly and allusively. Ellice's political career is yet to be chronicled in detail.

(2) Coventry Standard, 7 July 1837.

laws in 1846 exhausted Ellice's desire for extensive reforms. The formulae of 'civil and religious liberty', or words like them, were virtually all that he had to offer thereafter to those who looked still for change. He moved on the franchise question in 1859, in response to the clamour for parliamentary reform, but only to the extent of favouring household suffrage as an eventual, not immediate, goal, to be reached by easy stages. The radicals of the city showed their strength, and their dissatisfaction with Ellice's brand of Whiggery, when in 1851 they brought forward Geach at a bye-election in opposition to the old blues' candidate and soundly defeated him. Nevertheless, Ellice became more and more popular throughout the decade, attracting many votes from conservatives. Though mere seniority was in some measure responsible, so too, greatly, was the appeal of his moderation. The liberal coalition still existed, but it was now much less necessary to the old blues than to the radicals, as is shown by the latters' suing for it in 1852 and 1857.(1)

The prevailing moderation of movements in Coventry for political change is more tellingly demonstrated by looking at its manifestations on a wider canvas. In the troubled years after 1815 Coventry gave less cause for concern to Major-General Lyon than most other towns in the Midland District - on account both of the numbers of disaffected and of their behaviour. There was no problem in Coventry. Although 4000 attended the meeting to demand parliamentary reform in January 1817 only 200 from Coventry attended the well-publicised meeting of protest over Peterloo nearly three years later, when the constables almost equalled the spectators and were largely responsible for the violence that occurred. The battle on Greyfriars Green in 1819 was a pale shadow of the violence that occurred at Coventry elections in the 1820s and 1830s: but elections were licensed saturnalia, where violence was encouraged for purposes of political control by the city establishment. Much of the violence was in addition inflicted on the freemen by hired bullies from the countryside. Election riots were irruptions into the regular normal pattern of public life, not extensions of it.(2) So, in a sense, though committed by Coventrians, was the burning of Beck's mill in 1831 - the only violent incident in the Reform Bill crisis in the city. And for all its demonstration that violent impulses were present the

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(1) See, for this section, Chapter Two, sections III and IV, Chapter III, section I, and Chapter Seven.

(2) See Chapter Two, sections III and IV.

burning was entirely without revolutionary or indeed political implications: nor was it supported - quite the contrary - by radical leaders in Coventry. The evidence suggests that during the reform bill crisis the great majority of Coventrians were united behind the Whig bill - despite the loss to the freeman franchise this entailed - and that among the small minority who wished actively for a more extensive measure of reform there was no revolutionary activity or support for it.(1)

The Chartist years yield similar impressions. There were large meetings, 2,000 (if we accept the estimate of the Coventry Herald - the Standard's was lower) attending to hear O'Connor in 1838, 6,000 gathering on Greyfriars Green in August 1842, though some of these were neither Coventrians nor, it is likely, Chartists, but miners on strike from the north Warwickshire pits. 3,600 adult males in Coventry signed the first petition. But as to the continued support for Chartism on either side of these peaks of activity, the evidence once again suggests a small group of no more than several hundred committed Chartists. By 1848 there was little mass support. There was no Chartist violence in Coventry whatsoever, and few more verbal appeals to 'physical force'. One who continuously supported the Six Points - the lifelong radical William Taunton - voiced in 1839 a call to the people to arm, in the most uncompromising terms. But three years later he openly repudiated them, on the grounds that they had been intended 'to work on the fears of the people but seeing that they gained nothing by it, his opinion was now altered'.(2) In August 1842 Taunton acted as a special constable, and in that year he and David Buckney were the leading members of a group of Coventry Chartists who favoured a middle-class alliance and concurrent attempts to gain the Charter and corn law repeal.

Most Coventry Chartists, however, were not. Hostility to the ideas of a middle-class alliance and of corn law repeal grew from 1839 onwards, and seem to have been largely responsible for the departure from the Chartist movement, by 1841, of most of the small manufacturers and shopkeepers earlier prominent in it. Coventry Chartism was from 1841 onwards dominated by weavers and silk printers. The prevailing attitude amongst them was that if Chartists threw their weight behind the repeal movement, the middle classes would abandon them as soon as repeal was achieved. In any case, repeal would in itself be bad, since it would end both agricultural prosperity

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(1) See Chapter Three, sections II and III.

(2) Coventry Standard, 11 March 1842.

and the protection of Coventry ribbons; machinery that displaced hand-workers was the real threat. But this reactionary mood did not predominate in the city in the early 1840s; the Chartists were themselves a minority. Their praise of the corn laws had little effect on the election of 1841, where the repeal liberals, Ellice and Williams, gained large majorities. The Chartist mood of the early 1840s had died by the middle of the decade; and by 1848, when the movement had little mass support in the city, its most articulate leader was arguing that

> he wished to show the middle classes of society that their interests, and those of the working man, were really the same; and in addressing the multitude, he desired not to appeal to their animal passions, but to their reason and intellect, and to inculcate the observance of peace, law, and order.(1)

This attitude was dominant in the 1850s. The surviving working men in the main radical organisation, the Reform Association, united solidly behind middle-class leaders in the not very active pursuit of household suffrage. Working-class energies shifted in part away from direct political activity into institutions such as building societies dedicated to the idiom of self-improvement, both moral and material.(2)

And finally, to this record of muted protest should be added the curious reluctance of the dissenters to engage in a determined struggle with the Church of England over church and vicar's rates. The dissenters do not seem to have suffered from a numerical weakness which might be offered in explanation; and certainly in the 1830s and 1840s, the attitude of the Coventry Standard and the Anglicans clustered round the Religious and Useful Knowledge Society - with its tone of rancorous abuse - might have been expected to provoke them. In the 1850s the abuse ceased but church and vicar's rates remained; strenuous opposition to them among dissenters, however, almost ceased. A striking indication of both the decline in religious animosities and the lack of militancy among dissenters was the willingness of those in St. Michael's parish to join with Anglicans in a campaign to pay merely lower rates to punish a hated vicar.(3)

Thus the weavers of the city were militant and forceful but, in a proud self-discipline, rarely violent. The political mood of the city was liberal. There were many radicals, but they eschewed

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(1) Coventry Herald, 28 April 1848.

(2) See, for this section, Chapter Seven, sections II, III and V.

(3) See Chapter Seven, sections IV and V.

for the most part a radicalism which refused alliance with the middle class. Violence they at all times repudiated. The dissenters of the city were strangely lacking in militancy. Much in this record may be explained. The moderation of the weavers was in large measure due to the desire to retain the support of the city's establishment, newspapers and inhabitants for their cause. This desire was strong enough to overcome most impulses to industrial violence during the years of great distress from 1815 to 1835, and was reinforced by the growing prosperity of the years from 1835 to 1858. The strong impression of the period between 1815 and 1858 is that the city and the weaving force had concluded an implicit contract - for support and paternalism on the one hand, for moderation, discipline, and the avoidance of violence on the other. This reciprocal engagement was most graphically symbolised in the role of William Wilmot in the weavers' cause. Wilmot was an extreme reactionary Tory, a paternalist who loved to succour the meek and humble. He would never have agreed to act as solicitor for weavers whom he could not see as submissive and grateful poor. In his view of the weavers he was somewhat deluded - as the accounts of the meetings in 1851 where the weavers thanked him reveal: but the moderation of their conduct allowed Wilmot to delude himself - until, that is, the weavers' decision to cripple the factory masters in the summer of 1858. And the weavers' decision to employ Wilmot as solicitor - rather than one of the many radical lawyers of the city - seems to reflect their desire to impress the city with the trustworthy and peaceful nature of their conduct.(1)

Since there were so many weavers in Coventry the political moderation of the period is no doubt to be largely explained by reference to conditions in their trade. The well-known description of the Birmingham metal trades by Engels applies in large measure to Coventry.

> The disposition of the work has retained in Birmingham, as in most places where metals are wrought, something of the old handicraft character; the small employers are still to be found, who work with their apprentices in the shop at home ... the many small employers cannot well subsist on the profit divided amongst them, determined by competition, a profit under other circumstances absorbed by a single manufacturer ... The apprentices are, as we shall see, quite as badly off under the small employers as under the manufacturers, with the single difference that they, in turn, may become small employers, and attain a certain independence - that is to say, they are at best less directly exploited by the bourgeoisie than under the factory system. Thus these small employers are neither genuine proletarians, since they live in part upon the work of their

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(1) See Chapter Six, section I.

> apprentices, nor genuine bourgeois, since their principal means of support is their own work. This peculiar midway position of the Birmingham iron-worker is to blame for their having so rarely joined wholly and unreservedly in the English labour movements. Birmingham is a politically radical, but not a Chartist town.(1)

Engels's words apply with force to Coventry's second staple trade, watchmaking, with its many small masters and the ease of access to that status enjoyed by journeymen. More importantly, they apply to the ribbon trade, in their essential content. The first-hands were not independent manufacturers, but master craftsmen who collected silk from ribbon manufacturers for weaving by themselves and their journeymen in their topshops. On the other hand, since the manufacturers had no need of fixed capital for machinery it was easy for first-hands with savings acquired by 'the tea-pot system' to buy silk and set themselves up as manufacturers on their own account; in 1838, out of a total of 127 manufacturers working for wholesalers 40 were first-hands, owning only 121 looms between them, who had thriven to independent status. Men like these moved back and forth between the positions of first-hand and manufacturer as the fortunes of the trade dictated. As for the journeymen's journeymen who toiled in the first-hands' topshops, they too by the exercise of frugality could commonly purchase or hire the looms that distinguished the first-hand, the ease of this progress being reflected in the fact that in 1838 there were 1800 first-hands and only 1200 journeyhands. In the ribbon trade there were opportunities for rising in the world. Some could rise unusually far - like David Buckney, who began as a mere journeyman and by the 1840s had in Much Park Street the warehouse that betokened greater riches and status than those of the 'tea-pot' manufacturer who conducted his business from the top-shop that had served him as first-hand.(2)

So it is not surprising that within Coventry Chartism there were several leaders who stressed (as did Rattray in August 1842) that their social system had the merit of giving working men the opportunity they craved to rise in wealth and status; and that working men ought both to take advantage of this opportunity and to work with those middle classes who had already risen to remove those defects that yet existed in society.

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(1) Frederick Engels, The Condition of the Working-Class in England in 1844 (London, 1892), pp. 198 et seq.

(2) See Chapter Five, section I.

> The wealth producers, or the working classes, were not the only meritorious individuals in society; they were working men from necessity, not from choice. There was a deal of credit due to the man who, by his industry, ingeniousness, and economy raised himself from the lower ranks to the higher classes in society. He stated this much because he found the delusion was gaining ground, that virtue alone resided with the working classes.(1)

David Buckney made a complementary point to the Chartists of Coventry: that his rising in society did not mean that he was not 'still a working man, as industriously employed as any working man in Coventry'.(2) He uttered these words in response to the taunt that he had risen above and deserted his former Chartist comrades: that the taunt was made serves to recall once more that Rattray and Buckney were among the minority of Coventry Chartists - these being, for the most part, those radicals in the city who rejected the lures of social mobility and alliance with the middle classes.

But, once again, Coventry Chartists were themselves a minority of the city's radicals, the great majority of whom had no more than a fugitive commitment to the Six Points and adhered tenaciously to the principle of alliance with the middle class and the policies it implied or entailed - support for the parliamentary radicalism of William Williams, for the liberal coalition with the old blues, and for the repeal of the corn laws. The radical first-hand Edward Goode, who stood for all these things and set his face against Chartism, was a more typical weaver than those who joined the National Charter Association. That he was was due in part to the structure of the ribbon trade.

It was due in part too to the high earnings enjoyed by many ribbon weavers: by, in the late 1830s, those 1100 first-hands with two or more looms earning 21s. a week at least by the family labour that was usual: and by, fifteen years later, those many weavers, first-hands and journeymen, who gained from advancing technology in topshop and factory. The prosperity that was a precondition of Coventry's high earnings was itself due to fortunate national circumstance - the continuing tariff and the growing home market it protected. The power to take advantage of this good fortune was conferred on the weavers by local circumstance - the support given by the city to the list system. There was a parallel pattern of paternalistic support for those unemployed, or at work below the list, at times when prosperity was breached: a pattern that combined the

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(1) Coventry Standard, 26 August 1842.

(2) ibid., 13 December 1844.

dole charities, public distress funds and a statutory system of poor relief that was lavish before 1830 and from then to 1844 at all events more generous than the Poor Law Commission thought fit. These inter-locking causes help to explain the small number of radicals in Coventry who rejected movements frowned on by the city establishment, and also the moderate and peaceful conduct of those who, while joining such movements, had yet one eye on the benefits conferred by the paternalist system.

The truth of this judgement may be most concretely shown by re-examination of the events at two crisis-points when earnings were certainly not high and the list of prices had broken down. Immediately after the Napoleonic War a disastrous slump in the ribbon trade led to abandonment of the list of prices, and the failure of two attempts (one by honourable manufacturers, the other by several hundred citizens) to persuade the manufacturers to reinforce the list of prices in 1816 and 1817. In 1817 £3,300 was raised in the city for a distress fund for unemployed weavers and in the same year half the population of the city was being relieved by the statutory poor law in the combined parishes; the poor rate leapt up. In 1818 weavers, manufacturers and corporation joined in a vain attempt to gain statutory regulation of earnings: failure led to donkeying - some of it apparently watched without disapproval by an alderman and the chief constable - and in 1819 a general strike to regain the list. This was settled in the weavers' favour - the lists of 1819 being the result - partly with the help of the corporation; weavers on strike were relieved from a fund of £650 raised in the city. So it is not surprising that Peter Gregory remarked to the mayor after the strike that the mayor's warning against violence 'was received with the utmost deference and respect' and that, as a weavers' leader, he was prompted by 'the noblest feeling of the human mind - gratitude'.(1) One aftermath of the strike was the Aggregate Committee; its function was to dissuade masters from offering work below the 1819 list, and weavers from accepting it, and also to maintain the list by paying unemployment relief to surplus weavers from funds raised by the paternalist ribbon master, Charles Lilly. These events help to explain why Coventry was a cause of so little trouble to Major-General Lyon in 1817: why in the same year the meeting of 4,000 near Cook Street gate was so entirely peaceful: why the weavers' committee expressed in 1819 (a few weeks after their strike had been settled and Charles Lilly had opened the

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(1) The Times, 25 August 1819.

fund for the Aggregate Committee) their 'detestation of all revolutionary principles'(1) and their disapproval of the meeting on Greyfriars Green to protest at Peterloo - with the result that only 200 Coventrians attended: why in a constituency with a popular electorate only 500 voted for Cobbett (against the wishes of the corporation) in 1820 - though the violence of the supporters of Ellice and Moore was an additional explanation for this.(2)

Twenty years later there was a similar crisis in the city. In August 1840 the list of prices in the plain trade was generally abandoned, and the earnings of journeymen were reduced from 9s.6d. to 6s. a week, even when they were in full work. Many were not and were receiving poor relief. The scales for relief were much less generous in Coventry than they had been before, and were at the very start of the crisis reduced further in respect of outdoor relief as a result of pressure from the Poor Law Commission. But at least in Coventry, whose poor law régime was still in part autonomous, under its local act, outdoor relief was still permitted. Tories, radicals and Chartists united to protest in 1842 at the suggestion that the Poor Law Commission might gain powers over Coventry's directors of the poor, and would use them to stop outdoor relief - a development feared by the protesters. Their motives were a compound of desires for economy and humane treatment of the poor: yet the alliance of Chartists and Tories in defence of the directors of the poor explains much. So do the events at the end of 1841. At a public meeting convened to raise a fund for the distressed the Chartists Buckney and Taunton pressed the motion that 'the distress was attributable to the partial and unjust laws arising from the system of class legislation and the absence of salutary regulations between employers and their workmen'.(3) The respectable citizens left the meeting and convened elsewhere. The Chartists remaining discussed Buckney's motion, until it was pointed out that insistence on carrying it would place in jeopardy the generosity of the inhabitants. Buckney withdrew it: and in fact the distress fund raised appears to have been the largest since 1817. Finally, the way the plain list was regained in May 1842 is revealing. In May the plain weavers struck and formed their trade union. The honourable manufacturers wanted the return of the list; several aided

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(1) Bodleian Library: Gough Add. Warwickshire, b.2, newspaper cutting.

(2) See Chapter Two, sections II and III.

(3) Coventry Standard, 31 December 1841.

the weavers to form their union; one, Thomas Cope, lent a weaver cash to tide him over the strike. The chief constable, inhabitants and shopkeepers pressed the recalcitrant manufacturers: they signed the list once more. So it is not remarkable that even in 1841 and 1842, the years of the greatest Chartist activity in the city, there were no more than 200 or 300 consistently committed men - and that, more importantly, when an unprecedented 6,000 attended on Greyfriars Green in August 1842 there were no breaches of the peace - and William Taunton asked those present not to hiss at the thirty yeomanry troopers in the city who were merely doing their job.(1)

Since these men displayed such politeness, restraint, respect for legality and submissiveness to the city establishment, it is not surprising that the dissenters among them should have declined, except on rare occasions, to push their natural disapproval of church and vicar's rates to the extent of refusing to pay them: the habits bred by the ribbon trade went deep and spread wide. But there seem to have been other reasons for Coventry's peacefulness and moderation, in both its industrial and political modes. One impression that is yielded by the detailed record of early Victorian Coventry is of the attachment of the city to special, local privileges that were a legacy of Coventry's ancient past. The role of the dole charities in the alleviation of poverty has already been alluded to. Equally important as pacifiers - it seems probable and it is here argued - were the property privileges peculiar to freemen, above all the Sir Thomas White's loan fund and the Lammas right. Ironically, the real, current, practical value of these entitlements was, until the very end of our period, negligible. Only a small minority of freemen owned cattle or found it useful to 'father' the cows or horses of others. The loan fund was huge, but owing to the rules governing the issue of loans the greater part of it was locked up and inaccessible to the freemen. Marauders cast covetous eyes on both the land and the money. This situation the freemen were not prepared to accept. Their activity to preserve these privileges for their caste, their order, was continuous, determined, energetic: even more so was the struggle of the large majority of freemen to convert their Lammas right into freehold property for the freemen - a battle in which they were engaged not only with the proprietors of the soil, reluctant to grant compensation in land, but also with the small minority of freemen (led by the cowkeepers' tribune, Tom Paine) to

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(1) See Chapter Six, section II, Chapter Seven, sections II and III, and Chapter Nine, section I.

retain the pasture right in perpetuity. In their efforts to retain and convert their privileges the freemen had at least the neutral acquiescence of the greater part of the city; at crucial times - notably the crisis caused by the Charity Commission's scheme to confiscate the loan fund in 1856, they had its strenuous support - with, of course, the egregious Charles Bray as their only adversary. Few incidents in the city's history are more symbolically revealing: in its support for the special privileges of the freemen the city was buttressing a profound force for social stability.

Though the freemen at times articulated their defence of their rights in terms of the protection of the rights of the poor against the rich - as in their proclamation of June 1844 over the Lammas lands - the very nature of their rights excluded most of the city's poor from benefit; indeed, the rights were valued precisely because they were privileges. Thus, it seems fair to argue, the enjoyment of a privilege, whether actual or merely potential, and their sense of caste and group-identity, of separateness from their fellow poor, diverted the attention of freemen away from the grievances which all poor - they among them - might be thought to suffer under. And their displacement of energy into the retention or conversion of their privileges - or into squabbles with other freemen over the proposed conversion - absorbed vital forces from radical movements in the city. The detailed record in the local press shows that freemen's agitation over their privileges was far more continuous in the 1840s - seems to have absorbed far more energy - than the current campaign for the Six Points. The disparity seems revealing: the weight on one side of the scales helps to explain the lack of it on the other; the freemen's privileges help to account for the weakness of political radicalism in the city - above all for the fact that the Chartist movement was lacking in continuous thrust and drive. It seems too that the freemen's enjoyment of property rights - whether these were actual or latent - coupled with the city's support for these rights, bound them to the city establishment - made them in a sense part of it and helps to explain that respect for law and order which pervaded industrial and political movements in the city.(1)

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(1) See Chapter Eight, sections I and II.

II

It may be helpful to compare Coventry, in its leading features, with two Midland cities with which it is naturally associated - Leicester and Nottingham. All three were cities of the second rank. Coventry had 16,000 inhabitants in 1801, 21,000 in 1821 and 36,000 in 1851; the corresponding figures for Leicester were 17,000, 31,000, and 60,000, and for Nottingham 29,000, 42,000 and 58,000.(1) The staple industry of Leicester and Nottingham was textiles too - the knitting of the many varieties of hosiery, with Leicester concentrating on woollen goods and Nottingham on cotton; in Nottingham, lace-making was an important subsidiary trade. Also, in Leicester and Nottingham the outwork system, not steam factories, was the dominant mode of production until after the middle years of the century; stocking-frames and lace-machines creaked and clattered in domestic workshops.(2) Like Coventry, Leicester and Nottingham had corporations which were by the early nineteenth century close and self-perpetuating, all elements of popular control having long previously atrophied. Power was concentrated in narrow civic cliques, and in the hands of the town clerks who served and manipulated them; in its mixture of incompetence and the most ruthless self-advancement the career of Thomas Burbidge in Leicester had extraordinary parallels with that of his friend John Carter. The corporations had a narrow range of duties - concerned with the management of the corporate estate and sundry charities; Leicester corporation's execution of these tasks was marked by extreme incompetence until 1835; Burbidge on his

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(1) R.A. Church, Economic and Social Change in a Midland Town: Victorian Nottingham, 1815-1900 (London, 1966), pp. 10 et seq. A.T. Patterson, Radical Leicester (Leicester, 1954), pp. 39 et seq. For Coventry's population, see Chapter I, section IV, Table II.

(2) R.A. Church, op. cit., pp. 26 et seq.

dismissal from office when the corporation was reformed was found to owe his masters £10,000 - a record that not even the Carter family could match. Nottingham corporation was most inefficient too till the 1820s, when like Coventry it instituted reforms, though these do not seem to have gone far enough.

Like Coventry's too, the corporations of Leicester and Nottingham used the funds, patronage and influence in their control for purposes of electoral manipulation, and so contributed to the great violence that characterised electoral contests before the 1830s. In Nottingham corporation bullies cracked the heads of Tories, since the corporation was dissenting and Whig: the candidates it favoured were opponents of the French wars, high taxation and the suspension of Habeas Corpus, and advocates of parliamentary reform and 'civil and religious liberty' - just like Peter Moore, Coventry corporation's enemy in 1818 and 1826. Leicester corporation was as Anglican and Tory in sentiment as Coventry's and intervened in the 1826 election in the same way and, in part, for similar ends, Leicester corporation, too, making the 'No Popery' cry against Catholic Emancipation.(1) In all three boroughs, the turbulence of elections was due in part to the size of the electorate. Nottingham and Leicester had indeed larger electorates than Coventry's before the Great Reform Act. In both boroughs there were large numbers of freemen (or burgesses as they were usually called); they had the franchise, and in Nottingham, like Coventry a county of a city, the 40s. freeholders had it too - a right which was denied of course to freeholders in the county of Coventry. Freedom in Nottingham and Leicester was acquired, as in Coventry, by apprenticeship to a trade (and as a result many freemen were stockingers) but also by routes not open in Coventry - by, that is, birth, gift and purchase. In both boroughs the freedom was in the early nineteenth century sold or given (often to non-residents) on a lavish scale by the corporations, for purposes of electoral influence. Both boroughs had about 5,000 electors before the Great Reform Act, half the Leicester electors being non-resident and perhaps 1,500 of Nottingham's.(2)

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(1) R.W. Greaves, The Corporation of Leicester 1689-1836 (Oxford, 1939), pp. 17 et seq, 107 et seq. R.A. Church, op. cit., pp. 9 et seq. M.I. Thomis, Politics and Society in Nottingham (Oxford, 1969), pp. 143 et seq. D. Gray, Nottingham Through 500 Years (Nottingham, 1960), pp. 146 et seq.

(2) M.I. Thomis, op. cit., pp. 143 et seq, 235 et seq. D. Gray, op. cit., pp. 141 et seq. R.W. Greaves, op. cit., pp. 48 et seq. A.T. Patterson, op. cit., p. 193. The statement in J. Prest, op. cit., p. 138, that the pre-Reform franchises in Nottingham and Leicester were 'narrow' is very wide of the mark. The 1832 act disfranchised

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In both Nottingham and Leicester, like Coventry, national political issues were complicated and overlaid by local ones. Chief among these were the rights of the freemen.(1) A major cause of quarrel in Nottingham and Leicester was the corporations' mismanagement of the loan fund of Sir Thomas White's charity, which the boroughs shared with Coventry, Warwick and Northampton - Coventry alone, however, taking the eleemosynary fund. In both boroughs the freemen had rights of pasture over large areas of land close to the built-up area - rights that the freemen defended with immense force. In Leicester the freemen were opposed to the corporation, the owner of the land in question; this - the 'south fields' - was open field that the corporation wished to enclose and lease in severalty. A series of bitter quarrels occurred in the eighteenth century; they, and the impediment to urban growth, were ended by the extinction of the pasture right and the enclosure of the open fields in 1811 - the freemen receiving about one-quarter of the land in freehold to reward their intransigence.(2) Nottingham's case was more like Coventry's. An area slightly larger than that of the Lammas lands was even more hampering to urban growth. These were open fields over which the burgesses had rights of pasture for three months a year, though in 1832 only 200 burgesses out of 3,000 exercised the right. A combination of respect for the freemen's rights and self-interest (since one effect of the continuance of the open fields was to enhance the rental of other land owned by the corporation or members of it) led the unreformed corporation successfully to oppose the extinction of the pasture right and the conversion of the fields into severalty. Hence one alliance in Nottingham elections was between corporation and freemen - 'Whigs' - against the the freeholders - 'Tories' - who wished to enclose the land they

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(2) cont.
all freemen not resident within seven miles of their borough. The Leicester electorate sank to 3000 immediately and Nottingham's remained at about 5000 because the number of £10 householders added roughly equalled the non-residents. The 1832 act also stopped the future acquisition of the franchise by freemen by gift or purchase, and this provision, together with the inferior vitality of the apprenticeship mode in Nottingham and Leicester (as compared with Coventry) meant that while Coventry's freeman electorate steadily grew theirs declined steadily as those who had held the franchise before 1832 died off.

(1) The burgesses' property rights were confined to those who had gained the freedom by apprenticeship or birth. In Coventry, the very small number of those who had purchased the freedom were excluded from all the freemen's rights save that of becoming a victualler.

(2) R.W. Greaves, op. cit., pp. 80 et seq.

owned in the open fields. This alignment ended when the corporation was reformed, but owing to the freemen's determination to insist on compensation in freehold land the open fields were not enclosed until after 1845, under the provisions of a local act of that year.(1)

The three towns, therefore, had much in common. But the differences were in fact more significant. Above all, the hosiery trade was less prosperous than the ribbon trade. After prosperity in the late eighteenth century the hosiery industry was in difficulties from the early years of the century onwards. It has been calculated that the trade normally exported more than forty per cent of its output in the late eighteenth century. The export markets were disrupted by the trade war after 1805 between Britain and France. The shock helps to explain the unrest in the stocking-weaving districts in 1811 and after. More serious in the long term was the stagnation in exports of hosiery after the war - partly owing to continental tariffs and partly to the successful competition of the more technologically advanced Saxon industry, especially in the American market. The quantity of exports remained stationary in the thirty years after 1815. Home demand did not compensate for this sluggish export market. Long-term changes in fashion hit the industry very hard. As men turned to wearing trousers, gaiters and boots sales of fancy hosiery slumped. The knitting of this required more skill and time than that of plain hosiery; and so the flood of displaced fancy weavers into the plain trade had a particularly depressing effect - tending to cut wage-rates there. The demand for plain hosiery increased - but too slightly to absorb at high prices the output of the growing number and size of stocking-frames between 1812 and 1844. The number increased from 29,590 to 48,482, and at the same time their average productivity increased because the proportion of wide frames was larger at the end of the period. The evidence suggests strongly, indeed, that the supply of labour - ever-increasing - steadily outpaced demand for its products by a wide margin.(2)

That earnings fell steadily, with minor fluctuations, over the period 1810-1845, certainly points this way. Until 1810, framework knitters earned about 14s. or 15s. weekly. They dropped dramatically in that year. By 1819 they had fallen to 7s. a week, and until 1850

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(1) R.A. Church, op. cit., pp. 163 et seq. D. Gray, op. cit., pp. 184 et seq.

(2) R.A. Church, op. cit., pp. 26 et seq. F.A. Wells, The British Hosiery Trade: Its History and Organisation (London, 1935), pp. 94 et seq, 128 et seq.

they remained near that level. In 1833, for example, it was calculated that they varied between 3s. and 6s. in the worsted branch and 4s. and 7s. in the cotton, and in 1845 the average was again 7s. a week, for sixty hours' labour. The considered opinion of the contemporary most competent to judge, William Felkin, was that from 1811 to 1850 the average earnings of stockingers were 6s. a week.(1) This decline did not take place without many attempts by the stocking weavers to raise piece-work rates. The improvement of earnings (though by indirect methods, rather than by the institution of statutory piece-work rates) was a main motive of the unsuccessful attempt to gain a parliamentary act to regulate the trade in 1812 - an attempt in which the stockingers of Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire united.(2) A general strike throughout the area, for a common scale of piece-work rates which would have had the effect of both raising earnings to about 10s. or 11s., and of reducing competition between weavers and between masters, occurred in 1817. This too failed. Two years later, after further reductions in rates had occurred, another general strike occurred - for the 1817 'statement'.(3) This was more lastingly successful in Leicester than Nottingham, where the statement broke down in the spring of 1820 and was not restored for more than short periods in 1821 and 1823. By 1825 the statement had been abandoned throughout the hosiery area, strikes could not restore it, and further reductions followed in 1826. No further strikes were significantly successful till the late 1840s; indeed further reductions at times took place, notably in 1842.(4) The industry was bedevilled by a great excess of labour.

Much in this gloomy record is paralleled in the Coventry ribbon trade: but the differences are striking. The first reduction from standard prices came later, after the Napoleonic Wars. It was just as drastic, and was followed by unsuccessful attempts to maintain a list of prices in 1816 and 1817. A list (lower than the earlier ones) was gained in 1819, reaffirmed in 1822, but followed in 1824 by a lower list, and then by a lower one still in 1826. This was abandoned in 1828; a new - but lower - list was agreed in 1829; this

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(1) R.A. Church, op. cit., pp. 41 et seq. M.I. Thomis, op. cit., pp. 16 et seq.

(2) E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (Harmondsworth, 1968), pp. 585 et seq.

(3) In Coventry parlance, the 'list of prices'.

(4) J.L. and B. Hammond, The Skilled Labourer, 1760-1832 (London, 1919), pp. 247 et seq. A.T. Patterson, op. cit., pp. 124 et seq, 130 et seq. R.A. Church, op. cit., pp. 42 et seq.

too was soon abandoned, and was not reimposed till November 1831. This lasted till 1834, when it was replaced successively by two lower lists in the plain ribbon trade. But the list of 1831 for the plain trade was reaffirmed in 1835. This remained the plain list till 1860, and though abandoned from 1840 to May 1842 it was kept, save for minor infractions, thereafter.(1) In times of general abandonment - 1816-1819, 1828-1831, 1840-1842 - the earnings of Coventry ribbon weavers sank to disastrous levels - 6s. a week, for example, being the average net earnings of a journeyman weaver in the engine trade in 1840 and 1841. But even in the bad years, from 1815 to 1835, these periods were shorter in duration altogether than the periods when lists were (with minor infractions) observed by the trade. It is true that the average earnings of an engine-loom journeyman weaver in full work by the list sank from about 17s. to 9s.6d. in that time, which represented a drop in real terms too, since commodity prices dropped by no more than one third in the same period: and of course there were similar falls in the earnings of jacquard weavers and first-hands. But even at the bottom of this decline the range of average earnings by standard prices prevailing in 1835 and after - from 9s.6d. for the journeyman engine-loom weaver to 13s.6d. for the first-hand jacquard weaver(2) - yielded an average far higher than that usual for the hosiery trade for the entire period between 1819 and 1850 - 7s. It is also true that the earnings of the single-hand ribbon weaver were even by the list at best equal to the stockingers' average: but single-hand looms were in a minority in Coventry in 1818, rapidly dwindled in numbers in the decades that followed and had almost disappeared by the mid-1830s. After then, too, Coventry ribbon weavers gained higher earnings from technological advance - from, for example, the introduction of factories in the 1840s. Technological advance also occurred in the hosiery trade, wider frames being introduced: but the rates of earnings for stocking-weavers quoted above take into account this change. However examined, the earnings of framework-knitters were throughout the period significantly lower than those of Coventry ribbon weavers. Only once, between 1819 and 1824, and then only for part of the period, did the stockingers gain a 'statement' that yielded average earnings - 10s. or 11s. - near those that ribbon weavers gained from their list.

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(1) See Chapter Two, sections I, II, IV and V, Chapter Three, section III, and Chapter Six, section II.

(2) See Chapter Five, section IV.

The Coventry trade was much more buoyant. Despite the troubles that followed the French wars, the industry prospered under the prohibitive system (down to 1826) as the demand for ribbons grew. The increasing adoption of the engine loom bespeaks a willingness to advance technologically. But the industry was crucially inferior to continental producers in respect of price and design. Thus despite the tariff barrier substituted for prohibition in 1826 the trade went through the dreadful times from 1828 to 1832. Early in the 1830s, however, Coventry had achieved the ability to compete with Switzerland in price (given that is, help from the tariff) and began to prosper from the growth of a lower-class and middle-class market for ribbons in imitation of the upper-class market for French ribbons, itself stimulated by their legal admission after 1826. This new mass market was an entirely adventitious development, little contingent upon the city's efforts. The ribbons favoured by it were French in 'taste' and design, if not in origin: Coventry catered for it not by any energetic development of local designs, but by the theft, often of the crudest kind, of French patterns: so that it could be seriously lamented in the city, as late as the Cobden-Chevalier treaty, that it was an unjust treatment of the trade to give copyright protection to French designers.(1) Shielded by the tariff, and enabled by the lack of legal restriction to exploit the talents of French designers, Coventry was very fortunate - till 1860. Thus though there was throughout the period a surplus of productive power it was always less than that suffered by the hosiery trade. This is revealed not only by the consistently higher earnings in the Coventry ribbon trade, and by the much happier fortunes of the list as compared with the statement, but also - in the most graphic way - by the disparate effects of slumps upon the two areas.

In Coventry the underlying prosperity of the trade (as compared with less fortunate areas) was reinforced by traditions of paternalism and civic support. They combined to produce the list of prices and the high earnings that followed from it. But it is hard to believe that the paternalist tradition would have survived periods of disaster and overwhelming labour surplus greater than the relatively fortunate city endured. Certainly, the other ancient boroughs of Nottingham and Leicester had paternalist traditions too. The magistrates (who as in Coventry were drawn from the unreformed corporations) did not prosecute the framework-knitters' trades unions

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(1) See Chapter Four, section III, and Chapter Eleven, section I.

under the combination acts when it was obvious that they were intending merely to raise wages and were encouraging peaceful behaviour; when it was suspected that they were in fact a front for insurrectionary activities - as in 1814, with Gravener Henson's Framework-Knitters' Society in Nottingham - it was a different matter. Many hosiers too were paternalists, willing to pay by statement prices if all could be brought to do so - a necessary provision. In the disastrous years that followed the French wars, 1816 and 1817, they appear to have been as willing to do so as the Coventry ribbon masters. If their expressions of good intention were as unfruitful as those of their Coventry counterparts, it was for the same reason, an underlying surplus of labour.(1)

A striking parallel between all three cities occurred in 1819. In Coventry the honourable masters, corporation and inhabitants at large supported the successful ribbon weavers' strike and the Aggregate Committee that was set up after it to sustain the list of prices that resulted.(2) Throughout Leicestershire, Nottingham and Derbyshire the framework-knitters struck for the 'statement' in July and August 1819. There was much support for them in both towns from corporation, hosiers and inhabitants; in Leicester, for example, there were subscriptions for the strikers, a benefit night in the theatre, and sermons in their favour in church and chapel; meanwhile, in response to appeals and warnings from civic authorities, the stockingers behaved peacefully. In September the hosiers of the three counties agreed to the statement. To support it the stockingers founded the Framework-Knitters Friendly Society for the entire hosiery area. It was intended to provide relief for the unemployed and those unable to find work at statement prices. It was

> proposed simply by means of voluntary contributions to afford a subsistence, scanty it will probably be at best, to that portion of the labouring class who are destitute of employment, that they may not be compelled to offer their labour for next to nothing, and thus reduce the general rate of wages to the scale of depression which has already been productive of calamitous effects.(3)

Besides the contributions of stockingers, the society received cash from the corporations of Nottingham and Leicester, and from hosiers and well-wishers in both towns. In Leicester the statement was maintained for some years, with a struggle, reflected in the high

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(1) M.I. Thomis, op. cit., pp. 38 et seq. R.A. Church, op. cit., pp. 44 et seq. A.T. Patterson, op. cit., pp. 117 et seq.

(2) See Chapter Two, section II.

(3) The Rev. Robert Hall, quoted in R.W. Greaves, op. cit., p. 76.

payments from the fund - £6,000 in 1820, of which £1,400 was given by inhabitants and hosiers, and another £6,000 in the first four months of 1821, of which £1,500 came by way of an interest-free loan from gentlemen sympathisers. 1822 and 1823 were more prosperous years in Leicester; the statement was apparently maintained, and the loan repaid. But in Nottingham the statement had broken down by the spring of 1820. In the strike that followed in 1821 the stockingers received support from hosiers and £800 in contributions from local sympathisers; the strike was successful, but for a time only, and was followed by another of fugitive effect in 1823, again with local support. By 1825 the statement had broken down throughout the hosiery area and a series of strikes in Leicester and Nottingham could not restore it. The Friendly Society had collapsed under the strain of these events some time before. 1825 marks the end of concerted industrial action by stockingers to raise their earnings. A gross surplus of labour had finally defeated them: but it cannot be argued that their masters and cities were less paternalist in desire than Coventry.(1) It was merely that circumstances were much less favourable to their making the desire effective. Not until 1838 was another general union of framework-knitters formed. The Rev. J.P. Mursell was anxious to establish a list of prices in the trade as a prelude to a political alliance of the middle and working classes in the radical interest. He tried to get the Leicester hosiers to join the stockingers in setting up an organisation like the friendly society of 1819-1825. The employers refused, their spokesman Billson cogently arguing that they did so not from hostility to the idea, but from a conviction that the attempt would be hopeless. (2) The leading hosiers, when appealed to again in 1843 for an increase in piece-work rates, showed sympathy, but argued again that they were powerless as long as there was such an enormous surplus of labour.(3)

This great surplus of labour was in part responsible for the increasing stringency of the systems of statutory poor relief in both Leicester and Nottingham over the period. In Leicester there was in the early decades of the nineteenth century a policy of lavish outdoor relief of the unemployed and the underemployed by the parochial overseers, who, significantly, were strongly encouraged in this by the

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(1) R.W. Greaves, op. cit., pp. 75 et seq, A.T. Patterson, op. cit., pp. 124 et seq, 130 et seq. R.A. Church, op. cit., pp. 47 et seq. M.I. Thomis, op. cit., pp. 40, 59.

(2) A.T. Patterson, op. cit., pp. 298 et seq.

(3) ibid., p. 383.

justices - or, in other words, the most senior members of the Tory corporation under another name.(1) Sundry attempts by the vestries to bring the overseers under closer control and so reduce expenditure, including after 1819 the creation of select vestries, were largely ineffective because of the alliance of the justices and the overseers to defeat their attempts at economy. Only in one parish, St. Margaret's, and then not until the gaining of a private act in 1832 to remove the power of the justices, was the parochial campaign of economy really effective. For a year after the New Poor Law was introduced into Leicester in 1836 the guardians continued to provide outdoor relief for the able-bodied and did not introduce the Poor Law Commission's regulations for the administration of workhouses in their full rigour; in part, it seems, this relative leniency was due to the presence on the guardians of Tory paternalists. The guardians resolved in 1838, however, to end outdoor relief for the able-bodied, and to segregate the sexes to some extent in the new union workhouse then being completed. These decisions were a crucial precipitant of Chartism in the city, and in fact the decision to end outdoor relief for the able-bodied aroused so much dissension that it had to be rescinded; stringent labour-tests for outdoor relief were substituted. Events thus far in Leicester suggest parallels with the poor-relief policy followed in Coventry: a policy of lavish relief in the early decades of the century, with opposition to it from an 'economy' party, which won in Coventry in 1830 because of the increasing cost of poor relief at that time. Increased stringency after 1834 was due in part to pressure from the Poor Law Commission, but also to the continuing strength of purely local impulse to economy - though in Coventry the commission tended to get the blame for the changes this wrought also.

In several respects, however, Coventry's poor were more fortunate than those of Leicester. The continued exemption of Coventry till 1844 from the close control of the commissioners meant that the directors were able to grant outdoor relief to the unemployed in a more generous way than the Poor Law Commissioners thought fit. But, far more importantly, even after the assimilation of Coventry to the national system in 1844 the town was so much less intensely affected by slumps than Leicester, owing to the greater prosperity of the Coventry trade. In Coventry, there was no pressure from either ratepayers or Poor Law Board to discontinue outdoor relief for the able-bodied and bring them all into the workhouse: this would have

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(1) The mayor, the recorder, and the four aldermen who had last been mayor were the borough magistrates. R.W. Greaves, op. cit., p. 20

been a diseconomy, the costs of relieving a relatively small number of able-bodied paupers outdoors being outweighed by the expense of enlarging the workhouse. In Leicester, because of the greater number of outdoor paupers, the equation of cost-efficiency came out differently. The differences may be most concretely shown by reference to the slump of 1847-48. In January 1848 273 outpoor families were being relieved in Coventry and there were 345 persons in the house of industry. Both figures are higher than those of six months earlier and later: they may be taken, therefore, as reflections of the depth of the slump. If one multiplies the first figure by five (to arrive at the number of people on outdoor relief) one arrives at a total of about 1,750. To estimate the total who received relief between October 1847 and March 1848 perhaps this total should be doubled - to allow of course for people moving on and off relief and others taking their place. But not even with a larger multiplier may this total plausibly be made equal to the number relieved in Leicester in the six months that ended on Lady Day 1848 - 19,000. In the year that then concluded £32,000 were spent relieving the poor in Leicester. In Coventry the total was £3,845; for 1847 it was less. It is therefore not surprising that in Leicester a committee of the guardians decided early in 1848 that a larger workhouse should be built to accommodate the able-bodied poor, or that though this decision was not acted on the labour-test was more stringent in May - and so became, it would seem, more arduous than that in its neighbouring and more fortunate city. The added harshness of poor law policy in Leicester was a main cause of the large Chartist agitation in 1848. The disparity in poor law policy continued in the 1850s - and clearly reflected again Coventry's greater prosperity: Leicester gained somewhat from the coming of the factory but Coventry boomed. Between 1851 and 1856 poor relief in Leicester never cost less than £15,000 a year - and was kept down to this figure by the building of the new workhouse in 1851 and a draconian policy of relieving almost all the able-bodied within it. In the same period the cost of poor relief in Coventry was never more than £3,550: so the continuance there of outdoor relief for the able-bodied is understandable. Not until the early 1860s did Coventry have to deal with a problem of pauperism among the able-bodied as great as Leicester had experienced for years: in 1863 Coventry's workhouse was enlarged and the able-bodied paupers swept into it.(1)

(1) For this section, see R.W. Greaves, op. cit., pp. 42 et seq; A.T. Patterson, op. cit., pp. 158 et seq, 189 et seq, 290 et seq, 349 et seq, 359 et seq; V.C.H. Leicestershire, iv (London, 1958), pp. 209 et seq, 258 et seq: also Chapter Nine, section I, and Chapter Eleven, section III, and Appendix I.

In Nottingham outdooor relief was disbursed generously, down to the creation of the New Poor Law, in two of the city's parishes. In the third, St. Mary's, Absolem Barnett, full-time assistant overseer from 1819, introduced after that date both labour-tests and a less generous scale of relief for the outdoor able-bodied. In 1836 Barnett became clerk to the guardians of the three parishes thus united and a keen executor of the Poor Law Commission's policy.(1) Outdoor relief for able-bodied males was forbidden in 1836 in the Nottingham union. But in August 1837 the order was rescinded - the Poor Law Commission concurring - because the workhouse available (St. Mary's parish house) was far too small to accommodate all who clamoured for relief. For those in the workhouse living conditions were far worse than in Coventry or, apparently, in Leicester. Those outside it were certainly in a more unenviable position than the outdoor paupers in Coventry, since the guardians refused at times to levy enough rates to provide relief for all in need. A humanitarian group in the Nottingham guardians pressed for both more generous outdoor relief and also (unlike in Leicester) a new workhouse. In this last aim the Poor Law Commissioners supported them. At length the new workhouse was completed in 1843. But the balance of advantage to the poor is not clear, since the building of the workhouse added £4,000 to the debt of the guardians - already large because of the number of paupers - and partly as a result the inmates' diet was reduced in 1847 to bread and Indian corn. Beer, meat and cheese were dropped - something which never occurred in Coventry. And again in the interests of economy, the guardians in 1848 crammed 1,600 into the new workhouse, built to accommodate 1,000. It would be easy to contrast their callousness with the attitude of the Coventry directors; unsympathetic though these were they never went to such lengths. But Nottingham faced incomparably greater problems. In February 1842 one quarter of the city's population - or about 13,000 people - were receiving relief. In Coventry the comparable figure, for January 1842, was about 3,100.(2) The poor suffered in Nottingham and Leicester from their cities' being subjected to the close control of the Poor Law Commission earlier than was Coventry: but a much greater misfortune for both these cities was the far larger amount of destitution they

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(1) The assistant commissioner with whom the guardians in both Leicester and Nottingham had to deal in the 1830s was Edward Gulson, erstwhile director of the poor in Coventry.

(2) In Coventry there were 266 permanent and 302 casual outpoor families at that date. Multiplying these totals by five gives a figure of 2,840. There were also 308 people in the workhouse. See Appendix I.

suffered, which made a humanitarian poor law policy far more difficult.(1)

Certainly, the inhabitants of Leicester and Nottingham, like those of Coventry, were generous in subscribing to public funds for the relief of distress. Indeed, the amount subscribed in Nottingham between 1819 and 1841 - nearly £23,000 - was apparently much larger, even relatively, after making allowance for Nottingham's greater population, than the comparable figure for Coventry in the same period.(2) But quite apart from the smaller amount of distress in Coventry, the inhabitants had less crucial need to resort to such subscriptions, since Coventry was singularly fortunate in having at its disposal far greater resources for the non-statutory relief of destitution than either Nottingham or Leicester. In the 1820s the total value of annual disbursements of cash and goods from formal charities in Coventry was about £2,000, much the most important item being the Sir Thomas White £4 gift, amounting to about £700.(3) The maximum available from Nottingham charities in cash and goods in the same decade was between £220 and £225, and from those of Leicester about £150.(4) Thus in the twenty-three years between 1819 and 1841 £46,000 in money and goods were distributed from the formal charities of Coventry to the poor of the city - or double the amount spent by public distress-relief funds in Nottingham, and £18,000 more than the total of disbursements from charities and relief-funds in that city. Even when allowance is made for the use of the White £4 gift as electoral bribes in the 1820s, for the necessarily more random and haphazard distribution, as compared with statutory relief and distress funds, of doles from formal charities - their lack of close congruence with both personal need and economic depression - it seems fair to argue that in them Coventry had a most valuable instrument for alleviating poverty - and one incomparably larger than Nottingham's or Leicester's. For it the city had to thank both the munificence of

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(1) For this sketch of the Nottingham poor law, see R.A. Church, op. cit., pp. 112 et seq, 147.

(2) R.A. Church, op. cit., p. 106. See also A.T. Patterson, op. cit., p. 140. For Coventry, see Chapter Nine, section II.

(3) The annual value of the cash doles alone was in the 1850s over £2,000, and the value of goods distributed was several £100s more. The value of the financial doles - especially the Sir Thomas White £4 gift - had appreciated in the previous thirty years. See Chapter One, section III, Chapter Eight, section II, and Chapter Nine, section II.

(4) P.P.: H.C. 19 (1829) vii: 20th Report of the Charity Commissioners, pp. 383 et seq. V.C.H. Leicestershire, iv, pp. 410 et seq.

Sir Thomas White and other citizens in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, but also the great prosperity of Coventry, in that period, which in part made their generosity possible: the wealth of the Tudor city made the relief of distress, and hence social control, more possible in the Victorian city.

Coventry's staple trade was generally prosperous and the surplus of labour relatively small. It was possible for civic and industrial paternalism, and the workers themselves, to sustain high earnings at standard prices. It was possible too, for a city free until quite late from the close control of the Poor Law Commission, and far more importantly, enjoying both a quite small number of unemployed and destitute (at least for most of the period 1815-1860) and great means of informal relief, through dole charities, to alleviate poverty benignly. High earnings and an efficacious paternalism combined with the privileges of the large group of freemen - particularist advantages that bound the freemen to the city that respected and valued them - to create a pervasive moderation of conduct and attitude among weavers and poor. Coventry was a quiet city. Nottingham and Leicester had privileged freemen and strong traditions of paternalism. They lacked, however, Coventry's other advantages. Their staple trade was generally unprosperous, from 1810 onwards. The gross surplus of labour depressed earnings greatly and rendered ineffective paternalist action to raise and sustain them; such action thus ended in the 1820s. The unemployed and destitute were so numerous that the impulses in each city towards a humanitarian poor law policy were fruitless; they were also hindered (though this was a relatively minor aggravation of the problem) by their early subjection to the Poor Law Commission. Nor were the means of informal relief Nottingham and Leicester possessed as great - for all their depth of paternalist generosity - as those of the more fortunate Coventry, with lesser problems but incomparably larger dole charities.

The disparate fortunes of Leicester and Nottingham on one hand, and Coventry on the other, help to explain why their records of political and industrial action differ so radically, at crucial points - why Nottingham and Leicester were in general so much less moderate, peaceful and quiescent. Thus in the Luddite years, from 1811 to 1816, Coventry was entirely free from machine-breaking - or at least the entire lack of mention of it in any source may reasonably be held to prove so. So, too, was the town of Leicester, whose law-abiding quality during these years has been cogently attributed in part to the traditions of civic paternalism and in part to the

greater means of law-enforcement that the city possessed, as distinct from its surrounding area.(1) But these influences were ineffective in the town of Nottingham, which shared with the wide hosiery area outside it involvement in the systematic and organised frame-breaking of these years:(2) a course of action far more continuous and premeditated, and attended with far more violence to property and person, than the solitary example of mill-burning, much later, in Coventry: attended too, as strongly distinct from the apolitical Beck incident, with insurrectionary, quasi-revolutionary elements. Moreover, while the Beck burning was explicitly disowned and condemned by the weavers' leaders in Coventry, it seems probable that the Luddite jobs had, at least on some occasions, the approval and connivance of the stockingers' leaders in Nottingham. A community - or large portions of it, not merely a few usually submerged fragments - was involved.(3) The chief impulse to the movement came from the great depression in earnings in an industry grossly overstocked with labour.(4)

The contrast between Coventry and the other two cities continued after the Luddite years. The movement for radical reform was strong in Coventry, yet it was a movement of surpassing constitutionality; the existence of both revolutionary intent and Hampden Clubs which that intent elsewhere penetrated (together, of course, with more lawful aims) is denied in the sources, and in the one violent incident of these years, the Peterloo protest meeting in November 1819, it was certainly not the reformers who were primarily to blame. In Leicester there was a Hampden Club from the autumn of 1816. The corporate authorities persisted in regarding it as impregnated with revolutionary purpose. The argument, advanced by the historian of the town, that this belief was untrue, seems less

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(1) See A.T. Patterson, Radical Leicester, pp. 58 et seq, 106, and 'Luddism, Hampden Clubs, and Trades Unions in Leicestershire', English Historical Review, lxiii (1948).

(2) See M.I. Thomis, op. cit., pp. 86 et seq. The attempt of R.A. Church and S.D. Chapman, 'Gravener Henson and the English Working Class', E.L. Jones and G.E. Mingay, eds., Land, Labour and Population in the Industrial Revolution, (London, 1967), to demonstrate that Nottingham was relatively free from Luddism, seems singularly unconvincing.

(3) E.P. Thompson, op. cit., pp. 579 et seq, 924 et seq. The attempt in M.I. Thomis, op. cit., p. 95, to draw a distinction between Luddism and revolutionary intent seems a false and strained categorisation, in an analysis usually cogent.

(4) M.I. Thomis, op. cit., p. 80.

than wholly convincing since it leaves unanswered the important question as to why they held it, when their equally Tory colleagues in Coventry made no similar accusations in respect of their city. At the very least, the willingness of Leicester stockingers to join a society of which the civic authorities so strongly disapproved suggests far less concern for their good opinion than was shown by the weavers of Coventry in respect of W.G. Lewis's meeting.(1) But the differing fortunes of the two towns help to explain the divergence of attitude. There is no doubt at all where Nottingham is concerned. Men from it were at the heart of the complex plannings that ended in the Pentrich rebellion in 1817, and the town was 'the centre of the rebel movement'.(2)

The Chartist years provide a similar contrast. In Nottingham distressed framework-knitters were the core of the movement; the more highly paid lace-workers were, significantly, absent. In 1838 and 1839 the impression is of greater mass support than the Coventry movement, with more meetings and a tendency to larger numbers at them. A much greater contrast with Coventry, however, occurred from 1840 to 1842. Like Coventry Chartists those of Nottingham rejected, for the most part, the ideas of a middle-class alliance and of corn law repeal which was its common expression. But there were more Chartists in Nottingham, and they were more violent. It is true that Sir Charles Napier, in command of the soldiers stationed there, discounted all talk of an uprising in the city: nevertheless, it is significant that gunpowder was bought by Nottingham Chartists, that Chartist 'sentinels' walked the streets, that parties of dragoons patrolled the town after dark, and that two soldiers were shot at. Meanwhile, the threat to the public peace posed by the breaking up of Anti-Corn Law League meetings by large numbers of Chartists led the mayor to forbid the use of the public rooms for League meetings, and the mass nature of the movement is suggested by the 'huge procession' that met Feargus O'Connor when he visited the town in February 1842. These events occurred at the time that David Buckney was withdrawing his Chartist motion at the relief fund meeting in Coventry, and, while Anti-Corn Law League meetings were enlivened by Chartist barracking, none was broken up. But, while there were 3,100 paupers in Coventry, there were 13,000 in Nottingham.

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(1) A.T. Patterson, Radical Leicester, pp. 107 et seq. On the difficulty of discounting entirely accusations of insurrectionary purpose at this time, see E.P. Thompson, op. cit., pp. 629 et seq.

(2) M.I. Thomis, op. cit., pp. 200 et seq.

By August the two cities had moved yet further apart. In May the demand of the Coventry weavers for the reinstatement of their list of prices had been crowned with success, owing largely to the efforts of corporation and paternalist manufacturers. It is therefore understandable that the Chartist gathering on Greyfriars Green was, though large, scrupulously respectful of the magistrates' commands - and that William Taunton should have offered himself as a special constable. In Nottingham, on the other hand, stockingers struck in August for the higher earnings so long denied them, held a meeting in defiance of the magistrates' orders, and, when the meeting was broken up by police, marched through the town to draw out men on strike. When the Riot Act was read, it was snatched from the hands of a magistrate and torn up. The final refusal of some 5,000 Nottingham Chartists to disperse when assembled on the Mapperley Hills led to the arrest of 150. Six years later there was little Chartism of any sort in Coventry. But in contrast to the few score who met there, between 5,000 and 6,000 gathered in the Market Place in Nottingham for a gathering in April - and so concerned were the authorities that 1,600 special constables were sworn in, the gasworks provisioned to withstand a siege, barricades and chains erected in the streets, and boiling tar prepared. We are told that the fears were groundless, but, once again, the fact that they occurred in Nottingham but not in Coventry is significant. One reason, almost certainly, was that stockingers in work were paid much worse than ribbon weavers and that in Nottingham 1,600 were crammed into a workhouse built for 1,000, while their diet had been reduced to bread and Indian corn: Coventry paupers never suffered such a fate.(1)

Leicester Chartism provides a more effective contrast with the movement in Coventry - showing as it does in a direct and proximate way the energising role of the poverty of stockingers and hatred of the New Poor Law, so grossly incapable of relieving it humanely. Early in 1838, when their new union workhouse was almost complete, the Leicester guardians decided to stop outdoor relief for the able-

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(1) This sketch of Nottingham Chartism is based on R.A. Church, op. cit., pp. 128 et seq, and A.C. Wood, 'Chartism in Nottingham', Transactions of the Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire, lix (1955), pp. 43 et seq. The election of Feargus O'Connor as M.P. for Nottingham in 1847 is also a reflection of Chartist strength there. It should also be mentioned that, significantly, the tradition of a working-class radicalism which did not take its lead from the middle class was stronger in Nottingham than Coventry during the 1850s: Earnest Jones received 614 votes in the Nottingham contest at the general election of 1857 and a radical meeting in February 1858 passed a resolution in favour of manhood suffrage, while a similar motion ih Coventry was defeated at a comparable meeting. R.A. Church, op. cit., pp. 155 et seq. A.C. Wood, op. cit., p. 82.

bodied, and to subject the increased number of indoor paupers that would result to a much more rigorous discipline; in particular, they would be segregated. So great was the uproar that this latter decision was speedily modified: but the spectre of the Bastille had been thoroughly aroused, as it never was in Coventry. A few weeks later the Rev. J.P. Mursell, anxious to promote a union of middle-class and working-class radicals in the town, suggested a plan - essentially a revival of the eventually unsuccessful scheme of 1819-1825 - whereby the rich should help to create a fund to support unemployed stockingers; this would have had the effect of raising the earnings of those in work. The plan was welcomed by the stocking-weavers, and while it was being discussed there was some lessening of the militant working-class radicalism recently aroused: but in June the hosiers turned the scheme down flat, on the only too credible grounds that the surplus of labour in the trade made it unfeasible. The result of these developments was the rupture of the alliance, which, though uneasy, had previously existed between middle-class and working-class radicals in Leicester - an alliance that had taken as its meeting-place the demand for household suffrage - and the growth of a movement for the People's Charter. In this movement the poverty of stockingers, who predominated in it, and hatred of the New Poor Law, were chief compelling forces.

Strong too amongst most Leicester Chartists was distrust of the middle-class radicals of the town and of the several plans they advanced for a rapprochement. In these, as elsewhere, franchise extension (almost always, however, stopping short of universal suffrage) together with corn law repeal, were advanced as a programme for united action. Like the Chartists of Coventry, those of Leicester repudiated any alliance based on less than the Six Points, and were suspicious of the plea for corn law repeal. Some Leicester men (like the majority of Coventry Chartists) disliked the idea of repeal altogether and advanced a counter-philosophy of protectionism; for most Leicester men, however, uppermost was distrust of the motives of middle-class repealers in advancing the cause of repeal before universal suffrage had been gained, to secure its advantages for the working, rather than the middle, class. Opposition, whatever its motive, led to the same results as in Coventry - the invasion of repeal meetings by Chartists. In Leicester, however, the meetings were broken up by force, not merely disrupted by barracking or swayed by voting-power. The difference reflects a larger number of committed Chartists and a more violent idiom. By February 1839 there was a core of between 600 and 700 subscribing members to the Chartist

association - a far larger number, it seems certain, than in Coventry. 1,200 attended a meeting in Leicester in May, and 200 in Coventry a few months later. Calls to the people to arm themselves appear to have been more frequent in Leicester: amongst Coventry Chartists only Taunton is recorded as having voiced them, in the troubled weeks after the Bull Ring riots. More importantly, there were 200 or so Chartists in Leicester who talked in the summer of 1839 of 'Moscowing' the town.

It was in 1842 that the mood and tempo of Chartism in Leicester and Coventry were most sharply contrasted. The 732 members of the Leicester Chartist Association in December 1841 grew to 2,300 in July 1842, 2,700 in August, and 3,000 by the end of the year. The Coventry correspondent of the Northern Star boasted of 125 new members in the spring and summer - apparently the total. Bad though the situation of the ribbon weavers was in the winter there was no parallel to the processions of half-starving stocking-weavers who begged from door to door in Leicester: and in May the ribbon weavers regained their list, while the stockingers continued to starve. As to the poor law authorities to which the unemployed in both towns turned, in April the increasing arduousness of the labour-test for the outpoor in Leicester, and the badness of the bread with which they were relieved, led to extensive rioting and attempts at sabotage that had to be quelled by a large force of soldiers and county police: whereas in Coventry Chartists and Tories joined together to call for the retention of their autonomous poor law provision - regarded as more humane than the usual New Poor Law provision by all. There followed in August the mass turn-out of the stockingers, whose sense of grievance over low earnings was activated by striking coalminers - an explosive mixture quite without parallel in Coventry. Mass meetings of 5,000 or 6,000 were held every day in the week beginning 15 August, and the temperature was raised. On 18 August, mass processions of striking framework-knitters to force all out on strike were accompanied by assaults and violence; there were clashes with the police during the day, and in the evening a crowd gathered in the Market Place. 'The vast crowd was in a state of feverish excitement. Amid great uproar and confusion the mayor read the Riot Act.'(1) The police used force to break up the meeting. The crowd re-assembled in the Welford Road and stones were thrown at the yeomanry assembled, who used their cutlasses to disperse the crowd, while constables used their staves

(1) Daniel Merrick, The Warp of Life, or Social and Moral Threads (Leicester, 1876), p. 33.

freely. The following day a party of strikers, armed with iron bars, poles, and walking sticks, were dispersed by police and yeomanry on Mowmacre Hill.

If in the mid-1840s Chartist activity in Coventry and Leicester alike was on too small a scale to be often recorded the two towns were very dissimilar in 1848. Instead of the dying fall of the movement in Coventry, in Leicester there were many crowded meetings; there were 8,000 at one on the first Monday in April, followed by one of 3,000 in the evening. There were reports, perhaps exaggerated but certainly unparalleled in Coventry, of pikes being made and bullets cast. In June, months after the Kennington Common meeting often thought to mark the end of the movement, there were 1,500 members of the two Chartist associations in the town. One reason for this continued involvement has already been mentioned: the deep depression in Leicester, which had meant that the poor law guardians relieved 19,000 (at a cost of £32,000) in the year ending in March 1848. The increasing stringency of outdoor relief, caused in part by the great cost of the Leicester poor law, led to the Bastille riots of May, when for a week there was daily hand-to-hand combat in the streets between the unemployed and the regular and special constables.(1)

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(1) This sketch of Leicester Chartism has been based on A.T. Patterson op. cit., pp. 295 et seq, and J.F.C. Harrison, 'Chartism in Leicester', Asa Briggs, ed., Chartist Studies (London, 1959), pp. 99 et seq. See also Chapter Seven, sections II and III, and Chapter Nine, section I, for the Coventry reference in these paragraphs.

III

In social atmosphere Coventry often resembled the city with which any true Coventrian would, then and now, least like to be compared - Birmingham. In history and constitution no towns could have been more different: Birmingham lacked antiquity, a close array of medieval houses and churches, an old corporation, freemen, or a dense mass of eleemosynary charities from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries:(1) it lacked too the sense of the past and of the civic rights inherited from it that informed so much corporate action in Coventry. Symbolic of the contrast in vision between the two cities was the struggle of Birmingham in the 1830s for a charter to give a useful modern corporation(2), while a united Coventry battled for the retention of the county of the city - not, in high degree, for material gain, but rather to indulge in reverie of lost medieval greatness - to breathe life into the shadow of the imperial sway over north Warwickshire conferred by the charter of Henry VI.(3) 'Its recollections belong to distant and chivalrous times, when Brummagem was an obscure village, and Leamington was lost in its own

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(1) In 1830 the parishes of Birmingham and Edgbaston, and of those parts of Aston which in 1838 were to be joined with them to form the borough, had dole charities whose annual value was about £290. Charities disbursing a further £85 were added by 1860. The population of the borough was 177,922 in 1841 and 296,076 in 1861. V.C.H. Warwickshire, vii (London, 1964), pp. 9 et seq, 556 et seq. Birmingham had a lower ratio of dole disbursements to population than any of the other three boroughs considered in this chapter - Coventry, Nottingham and Leicester. The annual per capita value of dole charities was in 1841 about 1s.9d. in Coventry, at one extreme, and slightly more than one third of a penny in Birmingham, at the other.

(2) See Conrad Gill, History of Birmingham, i, Manor and Borough to 1865 (London, 1952), pp. 214 et seq.

(3) See Chapter One, section I.

mud.'(1) But however different the outward features and inward moods the two cities were in early Victorian times frequently similar in economic fortune and social attitude.

Birmingham was devoted to the production of a great variety of metal small-wares, from anvils to buttons, mostly in a large number of small workshops (though larger establishments existed too), where masters worked beside their skilled and semi-skilled artisans. Production was commonly carried on by means of simple tools and machines, which steam power might often assist, but did not replace. The small workshop could compete successfully with the large factory, whose greater size gave no competitive advantage. The cost of setting up as an independent manufacturer, in a small way, was not great - £50 sufficing in the brass trade. Many artisans invested such amounts: many rose: many fell again. The possibility of rising (and of sinking once more) and the comradeship of the small workshop where tasks were shared helped to smooth the natural asperities between masters and men, and to attach the small man to the aspirations and ambitions of the large. So, too, did the relative good fortune of the trade as a whole, and thus of the artisan who never rose. Slumps occurred, and were sometimes disastrous, especially during the period after the Napoleonic wars when the price of Birmingham metal goods steadily fell. But in the long term the market was buoyant and expanding: wages were high - 24s. a week being the average amount. In times of distress the artisan was benignly relieved by the poor law - compared, at least, with those in areas with a more acute problem of destitution, or earlier subject to the close control of central authority. The poor law in the parish of Birmingham was regulated by a local act of 1783, which (like Coventry's local act) sufficed to confer much freedom from the control of the Poor Law Commission till the 1844 act.(2) Thus until then the Birmingham guardians were able, like their Coventry counterparts, to continue in some degree their establi-shed tradition of generosity, and to grant outdoor relief more readily than the Poor Law Commission thought fit. But, in fact, as in Coventry, outdoor relief survived after 1844 in Birmingham.(3)

(1) Anonymous letter 'To the People of Coventry', Coventry Standard, 11 December 1846.

(2) In 1844 Birmingham joined Coventry in a vain attempt to get exemption from the act of that year. See Chapter Nine, section I.

(3) For this section, see W.H.B. Court, The Rise of the Midland Industries, 1600-1838 (London, 1938), passim, and esp. pp. 243 et seq; Asa Briggs, 'Thomas Attwood and the Economic Background of the Birmingham Political Union', Cambridge Historical Journal, ix (1947-49), pp. 190 et seq; Trygve R. Tholfsen, 'The Artisan and the Culture of Early Victorian Birmingham', University of Birmingham Historical Journal, iv (1953-54), pp. 146 et seq; V.C.H. Warwickshire, vii, pp. 321 et seq.

Early Victorian Birmingham was characterised by a certain ambivalence. Working men revealed an independence and self-reliance of mind and conduct that was nurtured by their prosperity and their hopes of rising in the world: but the same good fortune led them, for the most part, to place these qualities under the leadership of the masters and manufacturers that embodied their ideal forms.(1) During the Reform Bill crisis the great majority of artisans accepted the ideology of the Birmingham Political Union, with its emphasis on the necessity and value of unity between artisan and manufacturer, essentially in support of the Whig bill and its enfranchisement of the middle, but not, for the most part, the working class. The call for a much greater degree of parliamentary reform that was articulated by working-class radicals in Manchester and Leeds - where the factory inhibited the growth of class alliance - was much more muted in Birmingham.(2) In the early years of the Chartist agitation the demand for universal suffrage in Birmingham was dominated by the revived Birmingham Political Union, still under the leadership of Attwood; though since 1830 it had greatly extended its political demands, its leaders did so in the confident belief that were the Six Points conceded, the leadership of the middle classes would not be challenged. This faith was shaken by the popularity of O'Connorite Chartism amongst Birmingham working men between 1839 and 1842 - by its ideology of conflict between the middle and working classes, its distrust of corn law repeal as a measure likely to benefit the middle class, and the frequent invocation of 'physical force' to achieve political aims. The middle classes withdrew, for the most part, from the movement. These years were certainly marked by greater violence and tension than they were in Coventry. Meetings of increasing size and excitement in the Bull Ring in June 1839 prompted the mayor to call for a detachment from the Metropolitan police. Their violent dispersal of a peaceful meeting on 4 July provoked a week of disorder, in which soldiers had several times to be used to control the crowds, and even then the task was difficult. The excitement and tension stimulated the rioting and pillaging of shops round the Bull Ring in the evening of 15 July. There was further violence three years later, during the third week in August 1842, when on several days Chartists clashed with police and troops. At the same time, however, Joseph Sturge was attempting, through the

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(1) Trygve Tholfsen, loc. cit.

(2) Asa Briggs, 'The Background of the Parliamentary Reform Movement in Three English Cities', Cambridge Historical Journal, x (1950-52), pp. 293 et seq.

Complete Suffrage Union, to draw together in a common programme both middle-class and working-class radicals, in the manner of the 1830s. The CSU failed, but the idea of class unity for which it stood eventually triumphed, by 1847. Thereafter such an alliance dominated Birmingham: its theme was the acceptance by working-men of middle-class leadership in pursuit of the limited, safe aim of household suffrage.(1)

Coventry arrived at the same end - with indeed an easier journey on the way, as in the Chartist years - by routes sometimes similar and sometimes different: on the one hand, by an industrial structure that was dominated by the small workshop and gave opportunities for journeymen to become master craftsmen, and for both to become manufacturers, by a generally prosperous and expanding trade that gave quite high earnings, by a poor law system that at its worst eschewed the rigours of the New Poor Law: on the other hand, by a dense mass of eleemosynary charities and freemen's privileges. Thus the activity in Birmingham early in 1859, when working men both criticised Derby's 'fancy franchises' reform bill as offering far too little, and yet were content to accept household suffrage as the limit of their demands - the claim for manhood suffrage advanced by a few being voted down - was exactly paralleled in Coventry.(2) Coventry and Birmingham were not alone in this mood: it was characteristic of the great towns of Victorian England as a whole in 1860: by diverse routes the urban nation had reached the same conclusion.(3)

The Coventry electorate's increasing support of liberalism is most clearly reflected in its return of Edward Ellice to parliament time after time and, most tellingly, in its reverential acclaim of him when he visited the city in the 1850s. No more startling document from early Victorian Coventry exists than the diary that Kathleen Jane Ellice kept during the 1857 election:(4) it reveals a regard, an

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(1) Trygve R. Tholfsen, 'The Chartist Crisis in Birmingham', International Review of Social History, iii (1958), pp. 461 et seq, and 'The Origins of the Birmingham Caucus', Historical Journal, ii (1959), pp. 161 et seq. Conrad Gill, op. cit., pp. 241 et seq.

(2) Trygve R. Tholfsen, 'The Origins of the Birmingham Caucus', p. 181. See also Chapter Seven, section V.

(3) Trygve R. Tholfsen, 'The Transition to Democracy in Victorian England', International Review of Social History, vi (1961), pp. 226 et seq. See also John Vincent, The Formation of the Liberal Party (London, 1966), pp. 76 et seq, 161 et seq.

(4) National Library of Scotland: Ellice Papers E72/113 et seq: quoted in Chapter Seven, section V.

affection, an emotional exaltation in his presence, which seems inexplicable. Ellice was an old man, who had sat for the borough for nearly forty years: but in that time he had not once (so far as can be determined) visited the town except at elections. The weavers who climbed on his coach in 1857 would have had only a dozen or so chances of seeing him in forty years. He had performed acts of kindness for the city - like getting the Rev. William Drake the living of Holy Trinity and giving an Italian painting for hanging in St. Mary's Hall:(1) but such favours can hardly have counted for very much with most ribbon weavers. Personality, presence or patronage cannot account in large measure for the adulation with which he was received in 1857.

Ellice's representation of the city falls into two parts. In both he showed a surprising talent for opposing or ignoring the wishes of the majority of his constituents on important occasions: but offered enough to counterbalance this wayward independence. In the first period, down to about 1847, he failed to take any real steps to gain the reintroduction of the prohibitory laws on the import of foreign ribbons in the early 1830s;(2) he supported the plan to end the freeman franchise in 1835;(3) he lent no strength to William Williams's plan to get the stamp duty on the admission of freemen abolished in the late 1830s,(4) or to the campaign to preserve the city's independence from the Poor Law Commission in 1842.(5) But against these could be set his support for the freemen's claim for compensation in freehold land for the extinction of their Lammas rights,(6) and for the claims of the dissenters (on some occasions): and, much more importantly, his ardent support of the Great Reform Bill and of corn law repeal. This last, above all, appears to explain (so far as his ideas can) his growing popularity in the constituency.(7) In the second period, from about 1847 onwards, he displayed on one crucial occasion his continued ability to detach himself from his constituency: in 1856 he does not seem to have

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(1) These favours are mentioned by Katherine Jane Ellice, loc. cit.

(2) See Chapter Five, section III.

(3) See Chapter Four, section II.

(4) See Chapter Four, section III.

(5) See Chapter Nine, section I.

(6) See Chapter Eight, section I.

(7) See Chapter Seven, sections I, II and IV.

lifted a finger to combat the Charity Commission's scheme to expropriate the dole charities - a scheme that hardly anyone in the city had a good word for. For assistance here the city turned to Paxton, less popular than Ellice, and to William Williams - turned out by the Coventry electorate a decade before.(1) Against this, however, must be set (besides minor matters like his defence of the freeman franchise against Russell's attack in 1854)(2) the continued popularity he enjoyed from his advocacy of corn law repeal in the 1840s. As prosperity increased in the 1850s, and was attributed to the effects of repeal, so Ellice was given credit for it still. But, once again, nostalgia cannot explain the esteem in which he was held - especially since it was growing. It came, essentially, from his offering little that was new and nothing that was advanced, but all that was emollient and placatory: the deprecation of attempts to revive the divisive issue of religious rancour and the continued advocacy of dissenters' rights in vague terms, while their real grievances, church and vicar's rates, remained; unspectacular advance in education and on the franchise question - household suffrage being regarded by him even in the late 1850s merely as an eventual goal to be reached by easy stages; above all, the continuance of peaceful times (at home) while government was in the hands of sensible, moderate men like Palmerston.(3) He celebrated the status quo, and in voting for him so did the Coventry electorate. They were Liberal because they were conservative: since up to 1860 they had much to conserve - a prosperous trade, a burgeoning outwork system, a delicate mechanism for sustaining earnings, a relatively benign system for relieving the poor, and all sustained by the fifteen per cent tariff. The adulation of Ellice revealed by his daughter-in-law's diary was praise of their own good fortune, and of themselves - quite justifiably - for taking advantage of it and for turning it continually to account.

Katherine Jane Ellice's diary bears witness to the weavers' pride in themselves, their way of life, and their city. One year after she wrote it, the weavers began their battle against the large steam factories that had been built since the mid-1850s. Through superior productivity, turned to account by their proprietors by means of weekly wages, these were both imposing harsh work-rhythms on

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(1) See Chapter Eight, section II.

(2) See Chapter Four, section III.

(3) See Chapter Seven, section V.

the factory weavers and threatening to destroy the outwork system that most weavers worked in and which all - including factory weavers - most admired. The weavers' victory - the imposition of piece-work payments by the list of prices - benefited both groups of weavers: and was testimony both to their unity in the struggle and to the support they received from many in the city, attached like them to old ways. But the weavers' position was precarious in 1859, though they did not know it. No matter how modernised by a-la-bar looms and steam power, the outwork system could only survive the competition of foreign factories when it was protected by the tariff, given not only the inferior technology of the outwork system but also the poor or derivative designs of Coventry ribbons.

The Cobden-Chevalier treaty ended the tariff, without warning, or stay of execution. Coventry's trade could not hope to survive protected for ever, the only city in the kingdom (as Charles Bray pointed out) whose products were shielded by a tariff. Nor, of course, would continued protection have averted a decline due to a change in public taste: indeed such a change in 1860 aggravated the troubles caused by the treaty. The transitional protection given by Gladstone to the straw-plaiting trade of Bedfordshire did not save the straw-hat interest of Luton and Dunstable, which makes today as little impression on an industrial landscape dominated by Vauxhall motors as silk ribbons do by the side of British Leyland. But transitional protection would have helped the industry to adjust. It, in sundry forms, had been given to the corn interest in 1846.(1) It was the least that the city could reasonably expect. It was not offered, nor, in a parliament dominated by members who accepted the ideology of free trade, was it forcefully demanded. It had, of course, been expressly excluded by the treaty; French negotiators naturally eager to aggrandise their silk trade had persuaded Cobden to open the British trade to them immediately. It is impossible to dissent from the verdict of the Coventry Standard:

> That persons who have been engaged for a lifetime in a hard struggle to maintain their independence, who have denied themselves gratifications to preserve their position, should at last be cast down, without any fault of their own, is an act of reckless cruelty, not to be justified by considerations of political expediency.(2)

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(1) See D.C. Moore, 'The Corn Laws and High Farming', Economic History Review, 2nd series, xviii (1965-66), pp. 544 et seq.

(2) Coventry Standard, 9 August 1861. See also the judgement of the Coventry Free Press, 30 November 1860: 'We have been tauntingly told that "Coventry is not the whole country": we have never heard anyone declare that it was, but if it is not the whole country it is a part of it, and it has never dishonoured it'. See on this paragraph, Chapter Eleven, section I.

In the summer of 1860, the weavers did not at first abandon the attitude of rationality and moderation which had long been their distinguishing feature. They too saw the dangers of foreign competition, and did not insist on the retention of the existing list. They were prepared to accept a lower one, provided that it was general. What they wished to avoid was the internecine competition that would follow 'free labour'. The masters deserve understanding too. The most efficient factory proprietors, James Hart and his colleagues, who in the spring had declared that even with the list of prices they had every expectation of meeting continental competition, had no reason to like the weavers or to retain the list if they could abrogate it. Many of the less efficient factory masters, and the outdoor masters, who seem to have given covert support to the weavers in 1858 and 1859, had no prospect now - or thought they had not - of meeting that competition if the list were retained. Terrified by the prospect of ruin, they demanded free labour. Their rejection of the weavers' demand for a list of prices shows how deeply had penetrated the apprehension of the Swiss factories, with their carefully policed and disciplined labour-force. The weavers' general strike that followed this rejection injured above all the minority of honourable masters who stuck to the list still. This was an act of folly on the weavers' part - quite out of character with their attitude for forty years. It shows how disruptive of old moods was the abandonment of the list by the majority of manufacturers: not surprisingly, since it marked the destruction of ancient tradition.

The most dramatic change, in the summer of 1860, was in the attitude of the city itself. It too became convinced of the necessity for free labour. It gave only vestigial support to the weavers who struck for a list in July. The system that perished in that summer had lasted a long time, but it had always depended on a fortunate and precarious conjunction of circumstance: an underlying prosperity that made the list of prices possible, paternalist support from the city and honourable manufacturers that exploited that possibility for the weavers' advantage, disciplined and deferential militancy by the weavers to press that advantage home. In 1860 the prosperity and the paternalism disappeared as the city was 'continentalised': the militancy remained - without the deference - but was quite unable to restore the old system: the list had gone for ever. The Cobden treaty was its death sentence, the enlargement of Coventry workhouse in 1863 to accommodate the pool of permanently surplus weavers its monument, the emigration of thousands its elegy.(1)

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(1) For this section, see Chapter Eleven, sections II and III.

APPENDIX ONE: Poor Relief in the Combined Parishes, 1810-1861.(1)

I: TABLE IX

Years ending April	Poor Rate I St.M.	Poor Rate II Holy T.	III Amount Raised £	IV 'Cravings'	V Payments to Outpoor and for Lunatics (2)	VI Cost of Inpoor	VII Cost p.c. p.w. of food in w'house
1810	12s.6d.	9s.3d.	11780				
1811	13s.	9s.	11507				
1812	13s.3d.	8s.6d.	12034				
1813	14s.	10s.3d.	13152				
1814	12s.	7s.6d.	11459				
9 months ending December 1814	7s.6d.	4s.9d.	7164				

(1) Source of tables: C.R.O., Proceedings of the Guardians of the Poor for the Parish of St. Michaels, 1801-1861, pp. 60 et seq. This includes accounts for both parishes. Figures have been rounded off to the nearest £. The figures in columns 1, II, and III in Table IX are chiefly useful as guides to long-term trends: expenditure in any one year seems never to have equalled the amount raised; it was usual for a credit balance or a deficit to be carried over. More importantly, the rates 'granted' by the Directors (that is, the figures in columns I and II) were never collected in full in the appropriate year, in the period for which there are detailed statistics - from 1629 onwards. Part of the rate was allowably remitted, because of empty houses and 'cravings' - relief from payment given to paupers and others who while not paupers could not contribute to their relief; the rest of the uncollected rate was carried over for collection in the following year and added to the notional granted rate for that year. Thus for 1833 rates totalling £12,857 were granted which included £1,592 uncollected at the end of 1832. £11,093 of this rate was collected, £1,272 was allowed as 'cravings' and £492 was carried over for collection in the rate for 1834. Differences in the proportion collected help to explain why a given rate yielded different sums in contiguous years. Thus the granted rate for St. Michael's in the financial year ending Michaelmas 1855 included £1,022 uncollected at Michaelmas 1854, and this plus a 2s. rate was estimated to yield £6,295. In fact, £168 was written off and £188 carried over for collection in 1855/1856. This and the product of a 2s. rate were estimated to yield £6,060, but £464 had to be written off and £628 remained uncollected at Michaelmas 1856; so the rate collected in St. Michael's in 1855/1856 was only £4,968. The situation was similar in Holy Trinity. Differences between the amount raised and the totals spent on relief are explained by the costs of administration and loan charges, of the county rate (always high - £1,952 in 1833 and £1,199 in 1855/1856), of illegitimate children, of pensioners and of sundry other charges not listed here.

(2) Figures in this column are for the poor with settlements in and living in the combined parishes, the poor with settlements in other parishes, but living and being relieved in Coventry, and paupers with a settlement in Coventry but living and being relieved elsewhere.

Poor Relief in the Combined Parishes, 1810-1861. Table IX (cont.)

Cal. Year	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
1815	9s.	6s.	9154				
1816	15s.6d.	10s.	15696				
1817	19s.	13s.9d.	18832				
1818	16s.	11s.6d.	15586				
1819	15s.	9s.	14319				
1820	13s.3d.	7s.6d.	13447				
1821	12s.	8s.9d.	13984				
1822	9s.6d.	6s.	11207				
1823	9s.3d.	6s.	10744				
1824	8s.1d.	5s.9d.	10021				
1825	7s.8d.	5s.	8925				
1826	12s.8d.	7s.9d.	13646				
1827	9s.2d.	5s.8d.	11540				
1828	6s.6d.	5s.4d.	8889				
1829	15s.2d.	10s.7d.	16090	2187			
1830	15s.6d.	11s.3d.	20180	3372			
1831	13s.	9s.9d.	15910	2257			
1832	16s.3d.	9s.6d.	18844	3039			
1833	8s.2d.	5s.5d.	11093	1272	6863		2s. 5d.
1834	8s.0d.	5s.4d.	10098	986	6289		2s. 4d.
1835	8s.8d.	5s.11d.	10964	880	5462		2s. 3d.
1836	7s.6d.	4s.10d.	10130	522	4247		2s. 2d.
1837	5s.9d.	4s.0d.	8732	581	3806		2s. 2d.
1838(1)	2s.8d.	2s.2d.	8360	496	3868		2s.11d.
1839	3s.0d.	2s.4d.	8295	528	3592		2s. 7½d.
1840	2s.8d.	2s.2d.	9011	587	3749		2s. 6½d.
1841	3s.8d.	3s.0d.	11077	996	4248		2s. 6d.
1842	3s.4d.	2s.9d.	9275	1236	5414	2442	2s. 4d.
1843	2s.2d.	1s.10d.	8652	824	4645	2169	2s. 2½d.
1844	2s.2d.	1s.8d.	6878	521	2491	1611	2s. 8½d.
1845	2s.8d.	2s.2d.	7888	381	2826	1741	2s.10¼d.

(1) The sudden drop in rate poundages in 1838 was due to the effects of 6 & 7 Wm.IV, cap. 96: An Act to Regulate Parochial Assessments, which laid down (cl.1) that at times after 21 March 1837 - local dates to be settled by the Poor Law Commission - all rates were to be made on the full net annual value of the property. In Coventry, the rateable value had previously been set at one third of the annual value. Coventry Herald, 23 September 1836. Chadwick allowed the implementation of the act in Coventry to be postponed till 29 September 1837. M.H. 12/13377, Chadwick to the Directors of the Poor, 15 June 1837.

Poor Relief in the Combined Parishes, 1810-1861. Table IX (cont.)

					Payments to the Outpoor (1)		
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
1846	2s.4d.	2s.0d.	7137	408	2158	1920	2s.10¼d.
1847	2s.2d.	1s.8d.	7359	378	1698	2082	2s. 9¼d.
1848	1s.6d.	1s.4d.	6118	589	1758	2087	2s.10¾d.
1849	2s.4d.	1s.10d.	7388	360	1921	1742	2s. 7¾d.
1850	2s.0d.	1s.4d.	6243	209	1575	1235	2s. 3¾d.
1851	2s.2d.	1s.8d.	5820	84	1422	1145	2s. 2¾d.
1852	1s.8d.	1s.2d.	5291	101	1160	1147	2s.10¾d.
1853	1s.6d.	1s.2d.	6027	171	812	1305	
Years ending Michael-mas				'Voids'			Cost p.c. p.w. incl. clothing
1855	2s.0d.	1s.4d.	8390	269	1547	2008	3s. 6d.
1856	2s.0d.	1s.4d.	7510	651	1335	1813	3s. 4¼d.
1857	1s.8d.	1s.2d.	6568	74	1183	1454	3s. 4¼d.
1858							2s.10d.
1859	1s.8d.	1s.2d.	7972		1399	1244	2s. 9¼d.
1860	1s.10d.	1s.2d.	5289		1985	1422	3s. 0¾d.
1861							2s.11d.

(1) It is possible to distinguish, from 1846 onwards, the costs for the outpoor from those for lunatics previously aggregated with them. In the five years from 1846 to 1850 the cost of lunatics from Coventry at the county asylum varied from £513 to £587, the average being about £550. This sum ought to be deducted from the totals in column V from 1833 to 1845 to give the approximate cost of the outpoor in those years. NB that from 1846 onwards the categories of outpoor listed in note 2, p.606, are still included in this column.

Poor Relief in the Combined Parishes, 1810-1861 (continued)

II: TABLE X

	I	II	III	IV	V
	No. of persons in Hse. of Ind.	No. of perm. outpoor families	No. of casual outpoor families		Weekly payments to out-poor £
Mar.1810	255				94
Oct.1810	228				75
Mar.1811	230				90
Oct.1811	233				102
Mar.1812	245				113
Oct.1812	278				89
Mar.1813	287				96
Oct.1813	200				87
Mar.1814	201				87
Oct.1814	162				60
Jan.1815		377	230		
Jun.1815		147	147		

				Weekly payments to outpoor	
				Permanent	Casual
Oct.1815	162			65	17
Jan.1816	170	448	338		
Jun11816		511	456		
Oct.1816	265			65	164
Jan.1817	333	517	1104	74	233
Jun.1817		539	655		
Oct.1817	286			78	103
Jan.1818	298	565	601	76	106
Jun.1818		547	419		
Oct.1818	226			81	79
Jan.1819	283	554	557	85	102
Jun.1819		557	344		
Oct.1819	206			84	77
Jan.1820	246	621	559	85	111
Jun.1820		596	376		
Oct.1820	180			90	76
Jan.1821	213	616	541	104	90
Jun.1821		613	454		

Poor Relief in the Combined Parishes, 1810-1861. Table X (cont.)

	I	II	III	IV	V
Oct.1821	174			79	65
Jan.1822	193	616	523	79	79
Jun.1822		626	355		
Oct.1822	156			80	43
Jan.1823	171	635	397	79	60
Jun.1823		585	314		
Oct.1823	152			68	44
Jan.1824	159	566	389	68	56
Jun.1824		566	327		
Oct.1824	140			70	39
Jan.1825	145	574	290	71	42
Jun.1825		590	221		
Oct.1825	131				
Jan.1826	155	604	426	56	
Jun.1826		607	456		
Oct.1826	154			70	50
Jan.1827	172	605	433	71	64
Jun.1827		621	284		
Oct.1827	170			73	42
Jan.1828	184	633	319	73	54
Jun.1828		640	279		
Oct.1828	156			72	52
Jan.1829	202	625	467	73	79
Jun.1829		612	655		
Oct.1829	340			73	206
Jan.1830	454	614	1395	75	282
Jun.1830		651	511		
Oct.1830	236			76	61
Jan.1831	278	650	666	79	110
Jun.1831		642	516		
Oct.1831	316			73	71
Jan.1832	414	694	733	78	103
Jun.1832		672	485		
Oct.1832	237			76	57
Jan.1833	253	675	619	78	78
Jun.1833		667	400		
Oct.1833	222			72	48

Poor Relief in the Combined Parishes, 1810-1861. Table X (cont.)

	I	II	III	IV	V
Wkly av.'33	230	668	404	75	58
Jan.1834	260	660	423	71	66
Jun.1834		644	385		
Oct.1834	206			67	46
Wkly av.'34	231	645	377	69	54
Jan.1835	249	612	407	65	58
Jun.1835		610	225		
Oct.1835	183			62	28
Wkly av.'35	201	602	280	63	37
Jan.1836	175	580	193	61	26
Jun.1836		536	144		
Oct.1836	205			54	16
Wkly av.'36	198	525	154	59	20
Jan.1837	272	442	187	48	24
Jun.1837		404	276		
Oct.1837	243			43	23
Wkly av.'37	273	410	249	44	28
Jan.1838	228	384	317	43	36
Jun.1838		388	230		
Oct.1838	154			41	22
Wkly av.'38	163	381	247	42	25
Jan.1839	186	371	215	40	26
Jun.1839		343	189		
Oct.1839	212			39	25
Wkly av.'39	215	352	205	39	26
Jan.1840	246	341	230	39	28
Jun.1840		325	191		
Oct.1840	290			39	28
Wkly av.'40	304	328	229	40	30
Jan.1841	377	318	266	40	39
Jun.1841		256	272		
Oct.1841	242			45	33
Wkly av.'41	277	257	274	40	36
Jan.1842	308	266	302	68	44
Jul.1842	368	275	404	35	62
Wkly av.'42	346	288	390	41	57
Jan.1843	362	339	407	46	60

Poor Relief in the Combined Parishes, 1810-1861. Table X (cont.)

	I	II	III	IV	V
Jul.1843	228	336	117	56	20
Wkly av.'43	265	285	206	51	32
Jan.1844	214	196	125	22	21

	I No. of persons in House of Industry	II Outpoor families	III Payments to outpoor(1) £
Jul.1844	191	345	39
Wkly av.'44	206	316	41
Jan.1845	243	334	43
Jul.1845	172	307	37
Wkly av.'45	197	308	50
Jan.1846	238	304	40
Jul.1846	231	268	35
Wkly av.'46	229	268	52
Jan.1847	275	281	36
Jul.1847	263	247	30
Wkly av.'47	270	260	44
Jan.1848	345	273	38
Jul.1848	276	252	31
Wkly av.'48	276	254	44
Jan.1849	287	271	35
Jul.1849	219	225	29
Wkly av.'49	237	254	48
Jan.1850	241	240	35
Jul.1850	179	200	28
Wkly av.'50	201	196	41
Jan.1851	208	208	27
Jul.1851	193	182	23
Wkly av.'51	197	190	39
Jan.1852	178	169	22
Jul.1852			
Wkly av.'52			
Jan.1853	190	142	16
Jul.1853	149	147	15
Wkly av.'53	175		28

(1) The annual averages given in this column include the costs of the poor without Coventry settlements and of lunatics in the county asylum.

Poor Relief in the Combined Parishes, 1810-1861. Table X (cont.)

	I	II	III
Jan.1854	212	164	17
Jul.1854			
Wkly av.'54			
Jan.1855			

		Outpoor people
Mar.1855	261	268
Sep.1855	198	313
Average '55	231	280
Mar.1856	216	306
Sep.1856	171	247
Average '56	206	287
Mar.1857	154	269
Sep.1857	182	297
Average '57	170	254
Mar.1858	219	550
Sep.1858	170	341
Average '58	205	460
Mar.1859	171	353
Sep.1859	146	310
Average '59	170	327
Mar.1860	186	456
Sep.1860	236	837
Average '60	182	533
Mar.1861	272	1228
Sep.1861	319	2540
Average '61	303	1859

APPENDIX TWO

The Work of the Reformed Corporation

The commissioners who fixed the boundaries of each municipal borough after the Municipal Corporations Act decided that the boundary of Coventry was rightly coterminous with that of the county of the city. The reformed corporation was therefore elected, at first, by householders in that area, which was divided into six wards, returning thirty-six councillors. Five wards comprised the city, with the 'county' land outside it to the south, west and east. The North Ward, the biggest, comprised the county parishes of Foleshill, Anstey, Wyken, Sowe and Exhall, to the north. After the boundary dispute of the late 1830s, which the city lost, and the Coventry Boundary Act of 1842,(1) the municipality was narrowed to the very much smaller area that it preserved to the end of the nineteenth century. The number of wards was at the same time reduced to five, returning thirty councillors.(2)

The first elections for the reformed corporation were held at the end of 1835. Twenty-four of the thirty-six were dissenters, twelve Anglicans. Thirty-two (including all the dissenters) were liberals, and four Tories; all these were returned by the North Ward. They included George Eld; only one other member of the unreformed corporation was elected - T.S. Morris - one of the liberal minority in that body. All the twelve aldermen chosen were liberals too. The reformed corporation dismissed the town clerk of the old body, John Carter, as its first act of public business, and was involved for some months with the members of the unreformed corporation in a bitter quarrel over who were to be chosen as the trustees for the city's charities. The liberal majority carried in January 1836, against the votes of the four Tory members, an address expressing confidence in the government. The election of so many liberals, and

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(1) 5 & 6 Vict., cap. 110.

(2) See Chapter I, section I and Chapter Four, section II.

their behaviour when elected, reflected the hostility in the city towards the close, Tory corporation.(1) Such feelings did not last long. Conservatives soon began to be elected as councillors for the city wards - George Eld being the first in 1838. The number steadily increased thereafter; in 1849 about one-third were Tory, and the proportion stayed constant in the 1850s. This proportion reflected, approximately, what seems to have been political feeling in the city as shown in parliamentary elections. In the 1840s and 1850s Tories were chosen as aldermen, George Eld again being the first in 1844, and also as mayors. Party distinctions were in fact almost entirely lacking in real significance for much the greater part of the period 1836-1860. After 1836 the council chamber was only very rarely a sounding-board for party feelings.(2) Though debates were frequently acrimonious and abusive, division was provoked by personal rancour or by issues of principle that cut completely across conventional party boundaries. The descriptions 'Tory' and 'liberal' given in the press to councillors referred to their attitudes to national issues; their work in the council gave little purchase for these faiths to be applied.(3)

One issue was discussed many times: whether the June Great Fair, once held in the town-centre, but since 1823 placed on Greyfriars Green, should be moved elsewhere. As the fair became in the 1840s and 1850s more and more a festival occasion for thousands brought in by special train, those who lived near Greyfriars Green, and had no desire to sell beer, food, or trinkets, became more and more angry at the noise from circuses, side-shows, refreshment-tents and visitors. Tradesmen in the centre of the town(4) were allied with them in wanting

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(1) One reflection of the reformed corporation's desire to break entirely with the past was to sell by auction 243 items belonging to the old corporation - including kitchen and table ware, armour and Lady Godiva's hat, both from the great triennial procession, a common seal of the corporation, a three-gallon silver punchbowl inscribed with the city's arms, and several paintings. They fetched £101 at auction in 1836. C.W.C. Collection: Coventry Miscellany (Broadsides), i, Catalogue of Corporation property auctioned July 1836. Coventry Standard, 1 June 1838.

(2) The only instance I have discovered was the attempt in 1841 by John Warden, the newly elected Chartist plumber, to amend the address to the Queen congratulating her on the birth of a son, so as to draw her attention to national distress. He withdrew it. Coventry Standard, 17 December 1841.

(3) Coventry Mercury, 2 January 1836. Coventry Standard, 5 November 1838, 31 October 1840, 16 November 1849, 16 November 1860. Coventry Herald, 1 January, 15 January 1836. See also Chapter Four, section II.

(4) Greyfriars Green was on the edge of town until after 1860.

to draw the fair away from the green to outside their doors. On the other side were the tradesmen who operated near Greyfriars Green; there were few of them, and a more important group was the quiet folks who lived in the town and had nothing to sell. This controversy pressed on the town council, where interested parties took an active part. One typical debate filled an entire meeting of the council in June 1843. 103 inhabitants of the Greyfriars Green district petitioned for removal. John Warden told of his shopkeeper constituents in Bishop Street for whom their rate burdens would be lighter if only they could sell to the visitors. A Tory councillor, England, heartily agreed. William Browett, the radical Quaker draper of Cross Cheaping, ingenuously confessed that he looked forward to leasing the pavement outside his shop for 27s. if only the fair were brought near. But the opposition to having the narrow streets blocked with jugglers and crockery-vendors was so great that the motion was lost.(1) The dispute grumbled on for years, and surfaced dramatically in 1858. The presentation to the city of Russian guns captured in the Crimean War prompted a suggestion that the green should be turned into a park, with the guns as a showpiece, and the fair moved to Gosford Green. The plan pleased respectable non-shopkeeping citizens all over the city - except those who lived near Gosford Green. 3,000 signed a memorial approving the plan. Few shopkeepers were pleased; Gosford Green was even further away from the town-centre than Greyfriars Green. Many packed St. Mary's Hall to hear Richard Hands, a radical councillor, speak for their interest and argue for the old plan to move the fair to the city streets. 1,000 signed a memorial to that effect. The freemen complicated the issue; they, and their spokesman, Councillor William Taunton, attacked the plan to invade their pasture rights on the two greens, by emparking one and holding the fair on the other. 2,000 signed a memorial for the greens to stay as they were. The town council, after giving in to pressure from one side and voting to move the fair to Gosford Green, reversed its decision a few weeks later and gave in to the shopkeeper and freeman interest (after a freemen's demonstration); it resolved to leave the greens alone and, at last, hold the fair in the streets of the town. The affair had absorbed the attention of the council for two months.(2) For the fair, the traffic had to be excluded from Hales Street - an annoyance;

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(1) Coventry Standard, 2 June 1843.

(2) Coventry Standard, 2 April, 23 April, 30 April, 14 May, 4 June 1858. See also Chapter Eight, section I, for the bearing of this incident on the question of freemen's rights.

so was the noise of the merry-go-rounds. So next year the council decided on another city-centre site, draining Pool Meadow to give more space for stall-holders and leave the streets free. A house-holder with the apt pseudonym of 'Job' promptly wrote to complain that the immemorial peace of that part of town was now disturbed all day by drums, bagpipes, monkeys, parrots, a bear, and a barrel organ playing 'Annie Laurie'; he was also woken up by a cock crowing at 3 a.m.(1)

The shopkeepers had benefited at last in this battle with non-shopkeepers over the fair because they had had the adventitious aid of the freemen - a much stronger group. But throughout the period 1836-1860 the shopkeepers had the support of the mere householders (or many of them) in one issue - the desirability of spreading council contracts among the city's tradesmen, and the councillors among them. This was usually presented as one aspect of a general campaign for civic economy: it was argued that contracts should go out to tender and the lowest accepted. Many were quite sincere in arguing thus - for example, Abel Rotherham, 'honest Abel', the verbose, prickly, self-righteous, humourless and proudly incorruptible Wesleyan Methodist liberal draper of Smithford Street, the most unpopular man in Coventry. Two others who argued for tendering consistently were John Warden, William Browett (both radicals) and William Wilmot, the reactionary Tory who joined the council in 1839. Browett and Wilmot rather ingenuously gave the game away, however, by arguing that awarding council contracts by rotation would be a perfectly acceptable alternative; Wilmot had nothing to sell but did have shopkeeper constituents. Even tendering could be turned to account by unscrupulous tradesmen in a city where every one of them was related to a councillor and could find out what his neighbours had offered. One builder submitted the lowest tender for the repair of the market house in 1841. It was accepted. When the job was finished Abel Rotherham took a ladder to the roof and found that the old laths, mostly rotten, had been re-worked. He also discovered that the contractor was Alderman Booth's nephew. The bitter manner in which he told this tale in the town council explains why Rotherham was disliked as much by the honest as by the corrupt. A few years later Rotherham found by interrogating constables that Browett, successful in procuring a contract to supply cloth for police greatcoats, had provided the tailor with material so bad that it fell into holes. He lashed his fellow-draper, and fellow-liberal, in the council.

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(1) ibid., 11 June 1858, 17 June, 24 June, 1 July 1859.

When in 1845 the policemen's coats had again to be renewed Rotherham joined with Thomas Cope (a Tory), J.S. Whittem and A. Atkins (both radicals) in forcing through a proposal that they would be cheaper in the long run in London. Vehement but vain opposition came from Richard Hands, a radical tailor, and David Buckney, the Chartist ribbon manufacturer who served on the council from 1843 to 1849. Buckney argued that

> Mr. Whittem had said they were bound, as the advocates of free trade, to carry out the principles. Such free trade as that he would set his face against. He would not consent to employing tradesmen at a distance from Coventry when he was convinced their own townsmen were quite as competent for this business.(1)

But the recommendation that the coats be bought in London was carried. (2) Sometimes efficiency pulled one way, helping local tradesmen another.

The responsibility the old corporation had had over charities was transferred in 1836 to independent trustees, not the council. The council took over the duties of the street commissioners in February 1836. Thus the spheres of the two corporations were very different, the chief common link being the care of the corporate estate. For some seven years the corporation's discharge of its chief duty - watching, lighting, paving, and cleaning the city - was almost as perfunctory as had been that of the street commissioners. Shortage of money and the limited nature of statutory powers were largely responsible. One of the first acts of the new corporation was to double the number of the full-time constables, to fifteen; there were three officers in addition. This force was scarcely sufficient for the city and Hillfields was not watched at all, so that criminals found a sanctuary there and made it 'the grand depot for thievery'.(3) Even so they were more than the city could afford. The street act, still operative, had laid down a maximum street rate of 1s.6d.(4) This maximum was levied in the early years of the new corporation, but because of the outmoded assessment and the 'cravings' of many poor ratepayers yielded less than was needed, even by the modest computation of the watch committee. In 1838 the committee

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(1) ibid., 14 February 1845.

(2) See for this section, ibid., 16 August 1839, 12 February 1841, 11 February 1842, 17 February, 24 February 1843.

(3) ibid., 30 December 1842. Outlying parts of the city, not built when the local act was passed in 1790, were not watched, cleaned or lit. Nor did the inhabitants pay the street rate.

(4) 30 Geo. III, cap. 77, clause 29.

spent £2,126, of which £521 went on servicing the capital debt inherited from the commissioners, £894 on the police, £611 on lighting the streets, £50 for collecting the rate, and only £30 and £20 respectively on cleaning and repairing the streets. A 1s.6d. rate should have raised £2,550 - more than enough - but there were arrears of £530 and a deficit, therefore, of £100. By April 1839 the committee had outstanding bills of nearly £1,500, and only £700 in hand: it had to promise to pay debts as money came in. £900 in rates were uncollected. Nine months later ratepayers of St. Michael's alone owed £1,100. Somewhat easier times after 1842 brought a mitigation of the problem of arrears. Some relief was also brought by counsel's opinion, in 1841, to the effect that by the Municipal Corporations Act the council could spend up to a separate 6d. watch rate for police purposes; though the street rate for cleaning, lighting and paving was not to exceed the cost of these services under the commissioners - 1s.1½d. - a net gain of 1½d. was possible. Both maxima were henceforth levied. But even so, the watch rate, yielding at best £850, was less than the police required. And it is not surprising that the city could not afford to employ a professional surveyor, and so the chief constable had to superintend the repair of the streets - a task for which he had, he confessed, no talent: or that the contract for cleaning the streets offered so little that one year nobody tendered for it - so that inhabitants had to do the job themselves: or that the streets were badly lit: or that the few sewers and drains that were constructed in these years were paid for by private subscribers in the streets concerned.(1)

But the demands that were expressed for economy outran even this need. Here one keen advocate was William Browett, who wanted 'not cheese-paring the salaries of the menial officers of the corporation, but boldly to put the pruning knife into the large salaries'.(2) Browett complained bitterly when the salary of the gaoler (paid out of the county rate, not under as much pressure as the street rate) was increased from £120 to £130, and objected to the

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(1) For this section, see Coventry Standard, 20 January 1837, 16 November 1838, 4 January, 19 April, 17 May, 21 June 1839, 3 January, 5 June, 7 July 1840, 30 May 1841, 11 March, 18 March 1842, 1 September 1843, 15 March 1844, 14 February 1845.

(2) Coventry Standard, 6 November 1840. At that time the town council had only about a dozen full-time servants, apart from the police. The treasurer was a banker, and the town clerk a solicitor; they served part-time.

modest chairs provided for councillors on the grounds that they were more fit 'for St. Stephen's than for such a place as Coventry'.(1) Wilmot joined him in this economising ambition when he joined the council in 1839. He and Browett wished to cut the allowance given of £100 paid out of the borough rate to the mayor. They pressed in 1841 to get the town clerk paid a salary instead of fees - which added up to a great deal. This attempt was sensible - though nothing was done about it. The attempt of Browett and Wilmot to force a reduction of the watch rate from 6d. to 4½d. in 1842, on the grounds that fifteen constables were not needed, showed a more frenzied desire for economy. One other Tory, Charles Woodcock, and three liberals joined them. The argument simmered on for months, and their case was eventually demolished by the irrefragable statistics of George Eld and Abel Rotherham.(2)

Browett and Wilmot merely carried to an extreme, however, the narrow vision, restricted horizons, and meagre interpretation of their civic duties characteristic of almost all Coventry councillors in these years. Much needed to be done, and was clearly visible to all. The streets were badly lit, paved and cleansed. Piles of ordure lay in them; larger mounds were disposed on pieces of waste land. The very few sewers that existed were ill-constructed and overflowed in rainy weather. Much filth found its way into the Sherbourne, a stream whose flow was impeded by three corn-mill dams; it was estimated that 9,000 tons of dirt were piled behind them. Most houses drew their water from pumps and wells and only a minority from the Swanswell and Conduit Meadows waterworks; supply was in each case inadequate. The two parochial graveyards were disgustingly overcrowded and half-decomposed corpses were regularly disinterred and placed in ossuaries, under the churches, to make room for fresh burials.(3) Yet what is striking about the detailed record of the town council proceedings from 1836 to 1843 is that these defects were scarcely ever mentioned - and that only one man had any sense of what the city should do, or might do if it had the money. This was Abel Rotherham. Since the city had to pay exorbitant prices for gas from the local private company, Rotherham suggested that the

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(1) ibid., 1 September 1837.

(2) Coventry Standard, 17 February 1837, 13 November 1840, 12 November 1841, 24 March, 30 December 1842.

(3) P.P.: [610] H.C. (1845) xviii: Second Report of the Commissioners for Enquiry into the State of Large Towns, Appendix, Part II, pp. 258 et seq. The commission also attacked the overcrowding of the city, for which the Lammas lands were given the entire blame. See Chapter Eight, section I.

council should borrow £7,000 to build a municipal gasworks. He wanted a radical new assessment for the street rate, to provide more cash for improvements needed. He wanted a full-time surveyor, steps taken to culvert the city 'from end to end',(1) and the removal of the milldam on the Sherbourne to convert that stream into, at least, a flowing rather than a stagnant mass of sewage(2). But his colleagues would not listen to Abel Rotherham's schemes, and wrote them off as mere signs of his garrulous crankiness.(3) Only a few men in the city thought like him that much ought to be done. One was Thomas Bromfield, a watch manufacturer:

> I have always lamented, as a public man, and it has always been lamented by public men, that there is so little improvement in the minds of the friends of Coventry. I cannot, or ever could, attribute this to any other cause but having their minds and feelings formed by old customs, and being fond of an old state of things by which improvements are little known or dreamed of. We remain a century behind any other town.(4)

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(1) Coventry Standard, 25 May 1838.

(2) ibid., 11 May, 17 August, 7 September 1838, 8 November 1839. Even Rotherham's vision was limited on occasions. When the magistrates suggested some moderate improvements to the filthy watch-house, he angrily exclaimed that they wanted the council 'to lay out the public money in building waiting rooms, water closets, sofas, and carpeted parlours'. ibid., 11 August 1843.

(3) There was another side to Rotherham's concern for cost-efficiency. He was the only man in the city who wanted its poor law administration brought under the close control of the Poor Law Commission, for stricter economy. See Chapter Nine, section I.

(4) ibid., 28 October 1842. See also the anonymous letter 'To the People of Coventry' in ibid., 11 December 1846. 'Our ancient city is one of which we have many reasons to be proud. Its recollections belong to distant and chivalrous times, when Brummagem was an obscure village, and Leamington was lost in its own mud; to times when Princes delighted to honour it, and within its magnificent buildings, the noblest of the land were proud to find a tomb ... In those days there was little necessity for enterprise, and the shrines of saints and the relics of martyrs answered all the purposes of commerce and manufacture. We now have to make our way in the great struggle of the world, in which historical recollections and the remains of ancient splendour go for nothing. In this race we have not utterly fallen behind, but our progress has been marked by something of that apathy and listlessness which may have descended to us from ancient and uncompeting times ... Our new streets are unpaved, undrained nests of malaria and fever; narrow, filthy, unlighted; hateful both to sight and smell; amidst whose mud a stranger dares not venture after dark; and whose inhabitants are half shut out from society and civilisation. Yet we have suffered the ruinous bondage of the Lammas lands ... and whenever we have made an effort for relief, have suffered ourselves to be thwarted and defeated by a set of ignorant and prejudiced opponents. Look at our streets, paved in a manner that would disgrace a blind alley in Spitalfields, and judge, by the agonised grins in the face of every corny-footed stranger, what must he think of a place where such barbarities are inflicted in the nineteenth century.' NB that the correspondent does not mention, as an impediment to urban growth as great as the Lammas lands, the entailed land of the

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Coventry needed the shock of external stimulus. This was provided by the visit in 1843 of J.R. Martin, one of the assistant commissioners for the Royal Commission for Enquiry into the State of Large Towns and Populous Districts. His questions were put to a local committee, almost all of whose members were councillors. Martin's curiosity prompted debates in the council on the state of the town - the first to be held. William Browett and John Warden now joined Rotherham in complaining about the state of the graveyards and the Sherbourne, and demanding the construction of a cemetery and the removal of the milldams.(1) A few weeks later the council decided unanimously to apply for acts of parliament to make possible the removal of the dams and the construction of a municipal cemetery and a waterworks. Only Browett complained, a little, about the expense involved.(2) In the next three years, the necessary acts of parliament having been obtained, the milldams were removed, the new municipal waterworks were constructed at Radford, (3) and the cemetery was laid out by the side of the London road; Joseph Paxton was the architect of the cemetery. Those who most enthusiastically embraced these new ventures were George Eld, Charles Bray and J.S. Whittem, who now added to an early interest in geology avid study of reservoirs and high pressure systems.(4) Eld and Bray pressed for the building of public baths now that there was an ample supply of water, a proposal that was executed after some years. The plan was attacked by William Browett on the grounds of expense - a typical example of the way that he, Wilmot, Charles Woodcock and the Chartist David Buckney together fought a rearguard action in the interests of economy; while welcoming the innovations in principle, they shook their heads gloomily over the indebtedness and current expenditure they involved - complaining, for example, that the salary

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(4) cont.
Hertford and Gregory-Hood estates. He goes on to attack the apathy Coventry had shown towards the London and Birmingham railway - neither inviting it nor seeking to drive it away; the city was neglecting the opportunity conferred by its geographical position to make itself the centre of the national railway network.

(1) Coventry Standard, 1 September, 13 October 1843.

(2) ibid., 3 November 1843, 23 February 1844.

(3) On high ground, near Barr's Hill, to take advantage of the springs there, and gravitational flow.

(4) Abel Rotherham, who might have been expected to join them, left the council in 1844. On J.S. Whittem's wide-ranging speculative and scientific tastes, see the letter of his friend George Eliot to Maria Lewis, 20 May 1841, quoted in G.S. Haight, The George Eliot Letters, i, (New Haven 1954), p. 90.

(£130) paid to the superintendent of the cemetery was much too high, and that there was no need for a bookkeeper to be employed to keep the waterworks' accounts at £80 a year. As they many times said, they spoke for the interests of the ratepayers who elected them.(1)

The increased national feeling about the need for public health reform in 1847 and 1848, and the debates that surrounded the passage of the Public Health Act in 1848, affected Coventry too. Most members of the council, now awakened to the need for action, welcomed the opportunity to apply its provisions to Coventry - in particular, the opportunity for the council to become a local board of health, with increased sanitary and rating powers. The 'economy' group, while not denying the need for action, was against a hasty decision to place the city under central authority and to grant rating powers that might lead to wasteful expenditure. Woodcock thought that since only four people had been killed in the last outbreak of cholera in the city, it could not be very dirty, and that the promotion of its greater health was well within the powers conferred by the existing street act. It was pointed out that this act did not permit a larger rate than the present one, inadequate for any wider purpose. Buckney suggested a compromise - that the street act should continue to be used for the city centre and the Public Health Act for the outskirts, like Hillfields, that it did not cover at all. Nobody supported this recipe for administrative chaos, in any case constitutionally very difficult. A large majority voted to instruct the town clerk to express the council's willingness for the act to operate in Coventry.(2) By the

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(1) The two acts of parliament were the Coventry Water Act and the Coventry Cemetery and Improvement Act, L & P, 7 and 8 Vict., cap. 56 and cap. 76. Coventry Standard, 14 February, 26 September 1845, 19 June, 10 July 1846, 25 June, 8 October, 29 October, 12 November 1847, 11 February, 25 February 1848, 19 January 1849. It should be noted that Buckney and his fellow-radical John Warden interpreted their duties as watchdogs more seriously than most, in one sense: in the six months that ended in May 1844 only Warden attended all fourteen meetings of the Watch Committee, and only Buckney and the mayor nine out of ten meetings of the Estates Committee. Twelve out of eighteen members of the latter attended five times or less. Coventry Standard, 24 May 1844. Buckney, whose appreciation of fitting procedure and seemly expeditiousness had been heightened by many years of service at formal meetings of Chartists, radicals and freemen, was annoyed by the desultory and rambling nature of the council's discussions, and asked in 1846 that the 'usual rules of debate' be adopted; he wished discussion to take place only on motions previously made in good order. The reply from his colleagues was that the rules of 'good breeding' would suffice. Without that, rules would be fruitless; with it, they were redundant. ibid., 15 May 1846.

(2) Coventry Standard, 19 January 1849.

summer the order to apply the Public Health Act to Coventry had been issued: the local act was in effect repealed, except with respect to police and lighting, and these duties were to be exercised, for the entire municipality and not merely the smaller area previously subject to the local act, by the local board of health now set up (that is, the town council in its sanitary capacity); above all, the board would have the wide sanitary and rating powers granted by the 1848 act.(1) The General Board of Health's inspector, William Ranger, visited the city in February and collected the evidence on the need for sanitary action which he published in his report in the summer. Ranger recommended the construction of a network of narrow-bore tubular sewers, leading into an arterial sewer discharging into the Sherbourne below the town, and the installation of water closets (of which there were very few in the city). The capital needed would be borrowed, and when amortised over thirty years would cost a small house no more than 4d. a week, with the water rate. Exploitation of the supply of water provided by the new reservoir was a main feature of Ranger's plan. In addition, he recommended the better paving of the streets.(2)

Ranger's activity in Coventry and his report helped to convert the reluctant to his plan. When the scheme was discussed in July 1849 almost all members of the council were thoroughly in favour of it; even William Browett and David Buckney were now convinced. The only two who were not were Charles Woodcock and William Wilmot, two reactionary Tories. Woodcock did not believe that the atmosphere of Coventry was too bad, since he, a man of sixty, had much energy. When shown Ranger's figures he replied 'Medical evidence is one thing and facts another'.(3) And, he added, 'the introduction of the machinery of water closets into poor men's houses ... would be bringing the mischief into the house instead of keeping it, as it now is, on the outside'.(4) For the next six years, he, and Wilmot even more so, complained ceaselessly against the expense of Ranger's scheme, the replacement of the stand-pipe and the pump by the water-tap - said by Wilmot to provide inferior water - and against the water-closet, which Wilmot denounced

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(1) ibid., 27 July 1849.

(2) W. Ranger, Report to the General Board of Health ... the Sanitary Condition of the Inhabitants of the City of Coventry (London, 1849), pp. 21 et seq. Coventry Standard, 23 February, 2 March 1849.

(3) Coventry Standard, 20 July 1849.

(4) loc. cit. See also 6 July, 13 July 1849.

as an expensive nuisance to the poor, though it was, he admitted, suitable for the rich. Wilmot spent much of his time prowling round the city sorrowing over disused pumps. Undoubtedly, Wilmot spoke for some ratepayers on these issues; some preferred the free pump to the tapwater for which a water-rate had to be paid - like the inhabitants of Spon End who complained against the board of health's proposal to compel them to lay on water and induced the board to back down. Some resented the expense of installing a water-closet - and could not be compelled to do so unless a public nuisance was proved against them. The pace of improvement was slowed down. But at no time was the opposition large enough, or coherent enough, to stop it. Wilmot's vast popularity in his ward, Gosford Street, seems to have been due far more to his support of freemen and weavers against enclosers and manufacturers, than to his hatred of taps and closets. Opposition was mounted at the municipal elections of 1852 against the leader of the sanitary group on the council - Thomas Jenkins, a liberal chemist and druggist who dedicated himself in the early 1850s to Ranger's scheme and to instructing the council on the subject of traps, gullies and tubular drains. His opponents objected to the expense of Ranger's scheme. But, significantly, Jenkins was re-elected.(1)

With the agreement of all members of the council save Woodcock and Wilmot, the scheme was pushed ahead in the 1850s. The only disagreement in the council was over the desire of Ranger and others to build all sewers of glazed pipe and to retrieve sewage at the main outfall for sale to farmers as manure - notions backed by the General Board of Health in Chadwick's day.(2) Thomas Jenkins and Charles Bray were keen advocates of both in Coventry, and J.S. Whittem and George Eld very dubious. Few buyers came forward for a large tank of sewage placed in Spon End as an experiment - much to the annoyance of inhabitants - and the council decided to drop the resale plan. The failure of tubular drains elsewhere(3) led the council

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(1) Coventry Standard, 17 August 1849, 4 July, 12 December 1851, 27 February, 29 October 1852, 23 September 1853, 15 September, 3 November 1854, 27 July 1855. See also Chapter Six, section I for Wilmot's popularity in Gosford Street.

(2) W. Ranger, Report to the Local Board of Health, on ... the Proposed Application of the Sewage to Agricultural Purposes (Coventry, 1851), pp. 3 et seq. T.A. Yarrow, The Drainage of Coventry ... with proposals for a self-sustaining system of sewage removal (London, 1852), pp. 3 et seq. Charles Bray, Our Sanitary Condition, Past, Present and Future (Coventry, 1852), pp. 4 et seq.

(3) See S.E. Finer, The Life and Times of Sir Edwin Chadwick (London, 1952), and R.A. Lewis, Edwin Chadwick and the Public Health Movement (London, 1952).

eventually to opt for an arterial sewer of brick, with tubular tributaries. The sewerage system was completed in 1857. Many households were willingly connected both to the sewerage and water systems, and others compelled to be, under the Public Health Act. 1,000 houses (out of about 8,000) were connected to the sewerage system when it became operative in 1857.(1) In addition, a start was made in removing the pigs which had caused so much dirt in some parts of town. The stretch of the Sherbourne in town was cleaned out. It remained clean (or at least less filthy than it had been). (2) In the same years the work of macadamising Coventry streets previously paved with 'kidney stones', or not at all, and of providing them with sidewalks, went steadily ahead. So did the work of installing more gas lamps in the city, while at last the Gas Company was induced to lower its tariff. In 1857 (at long last) a new watch-house was built. In the same year all the houses in the city were numbered by the surveyor's department - a reflection of the growth of the town, and of the number of letters delivered in it, which made it more and more difficult to identify people by vague or informal addresses.(3)

The old town was improved. The additions to it in the 1850s were regulated by standards of construction and amenity for houses, other buildings, and streets, prescribed by the board of health and promulgated in a code of bye-laws.(4) The evidence suggests that the board of health usually imposed these standards firmly. In 1850, for example, the plan for the factory that Betts and Rider proposed to build in West Orchard was unanimously turned down because insufficient water-closets were provided, and one East was prosecuted because he had converted a malt-house into tenements after being informed that the local board of health would not pass his plan. New buildings were regularly inspected to see if the regulations had

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(1) The last privies were replaced in the 1920s: see V.C.H. Warwickshire, viii, p. 279.

(2) But Coventry's gain was Warwickshire's loss: the consequence of the new main sewer's discharging into the river lower down was pollution of the Sowe and the Avon, as far as Stratford. See V.C.H. Warwickshire, viii, pp. 278 et seq.

(3) Coventry Standard, 28 September, 26 October, 21 December 1849, 29 March, 12 April 1850, 6 June, 28 November, 5 December 1851, 20 February 1852, 6 May, 17 June, 12 August, 21 October 1853, 10 March 1854, 15 February, 4 April, 25 July, 3 October, 17 October, 19 December 1856, 27 March, 21 May, 3 July 1857, 8 January, 23 July 1858, 19 August 1859.

(4) C.W.C.: Pamphlets Collection, Bye-laws and Penalties of the Local Board of Health (Coventry, 1851).

been complied with. For this work a surveyor was necessary. A part-time surveyor was engaged in 1849; he found it impossible to undertake all the duties of his office properly. So in 1852 a full-time surveyor was engaged. This was Greatorex, generally regarded as a highly efficient and zealous officer, who scrutinised building plans carefully and pursued delinquent builders with vigour. By 1856 he had established a small direct-labour force to carry out minor street works for the board of health more frugally than would, it was thought, be possible by contract.(1) Made necessary by the need to discover keepers of pigs and overflowing privies was an inspector of nuisances - a post to which Inspector Vice of the city police was appointed in 1850. The size of the police force was governed by the 6d. watch rate permitted under the street act, and in 1853 the force still consisted of eighteen men, as in 1836. Soon after, however, the growing yield of the 6d. rate permitted an increase to twenty-three. The police act of 1856, with its provision that forces deemed efficient by the inspector of constabulary would attract a government grant, prompted a further increase to thirty-five, to obtain both the inspector's certificate and the grant; the extra twelve men were thus added for little additional cost to the city. By 1858, for the first time the police force were able to institute a regular patrol of all areas of the town: the force was increased just before the industrial disturbances of 1858 and 1859 made the extra men invaluable to the city establishment.(2)

For several reasons the financial burden of these amenities was made lighter than the pessimists gloomily predicted. A general district rate replaced the old street rate, to finance the sewerage and drainage works, and the cleaning, paving and lighting of the streets.(3) A new assessment was carried out in 1849. It gave a total rateable value of £61,427 as against £34,000 for the old street rate. Since it was much more inclusive and equitable than the old - covering, for example, Hillfields, previously exempt, the burden was spread more widely. More importantly, the rateable value increased steadily as the city grew in the prosperity of the 1850s;

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(1) Coventry Standard, 14 September, 28 September, 23 November 1849, 7 June, 16 August, 20 December 1850, 8 October 1852, 26 August 1853, 23 March 1854, 2 June 1854, 11 January 1856.

(2) Coventry Standard, 4 January 1850, 12 August 1853, 5 June, 12 June 1857, 5 February 1858.

(3) The watch and water rates remained separate. So, of course, did the borough rate, to pay for the functions of the corporation, strictly considered.

by 1858 it was £99,436. So a penny rate raised about £140 in 1842 and about £415 a generation later. £20,000 for the sewerage and drainage works were borrowed from the Provident Life Office at four per cent in 1854: another £13,300 were borrowed from the Public Works Loan Commissioners at five per cent in 1857, but were replaced the following year by a loan from the Economic Assurance Society at one-half per cent lower. The burden of the loans, and of all the minor pieces of civic improvement carried out in the 1850s was carried by rates of 1s.10d. or 2s. in the £ - levies which yielded constantly increasing sums.(1)

Individual taxpayers, therefore, had to bear only a light cost for the civic improvements of the 1850s. Also, their value was immediately apparent to most. Opposition to them was therefore slight in the city, and vestigial in the council. But to suggestions for expenditure whose worth was not patent opposition was still very strong - even though they might cost very little compared with Ranger's main sewer. In 1852 Henry Soden suggested that the city ought to appoint a medical officer of health. On this occasion everybody else agreed with Wilmot that one was not necessary. Lynes clinched matters by pointing out that if medical advice were needed it could always be gained, in return for a fee. J.S. Whittem brought the matter up again in 1857. He argued that the salary of £400 or £500 would be well repaid by the improvement in the health of the humbler classes. He pointed to the achievements of medical officers in the towns that had appointed them. The board was unimpressed. Wilmot's argument that bad health was due to giant factories seems to have been regarded as yet another example of his cranky obsessiveness - but almost all agreed with him that the rates could not stand another salary. The proposal was defeated.(2) So too, in 1856, was the proposal of Alderman Lynes, the Tory leader, that a municipal museum and art gallery should be built. Wilmot was intensely angry on this occasion. 'They had no right, as a corporation, to spend the public money ... for ... a picture gallery ... they were luxuries, which ought not to be upon the already over-burdened ratepayers.'(3)

Wilmot was joined in this debate, by William Taunton, newly elected a councillor. For many years he and Wilmot had been at opposite poles politically, though united on the question of freemen's

(1) Coventry Standard, 18 January, 15 February 1850, 4 April 1851, 8 September 1854, 16 February 1855, 12 June 1857, 30 July, 20 August 1858.

(2) Coventry Standard, 30 July 1852, 23 October 1857.

(3) ibid., 5 December 1856.

rights. Taunton did not share Wilmot's notions on taps and water closets: on other aspects of civic government they were at one. They objected to the town clerk being paid by fees, instead of a stipend, amounting to less money; they pointed out that he did about four hours' work a week on the council's behalf and for this £400 or £500 a year would be good recompense. They protested at the fact that the municipal accounts were invariably published late, and incomprehensible when they came. They objected to councillors who were unsuccessful in gaining re-election being made aldermen; this was a sore point with the democratic Taunton and also with Wilmot, whose probing garrulousness had led his colleagues not to propose him for alderman - and also to keep him off committees, though by the late 1850s he had served longer than all other councillors. They wished all public works in the city to be undertaken by tradesmen, not Greatorex's direct-labour department of nine workmen. Above all, Taunton and Wilmot objected to profligate expenditure and 'exorbitant salaries'. From 1856 onwards they attracted round them a growing number of men, Tory and liberal, who agreed with some or all of these ideas and who spoke for the interest of the ratepayers and tradesmen. In 1858 they formed the Ratepayers Protection Association; Taunton became its president, Nathaniel Poole, the freemen's leader, its secretary. George Hemming, confectioner and onetime Chartist, was another keen member.

The group won some victories in council proceedings. They succeeded in getting the town clerk paid a salary of £500 - Taunton suggesting £400. They raised the issue of direct-labour versus tradesmen's rights over the building of Mill Lane bridge. Many in the council argued - apparently with justice - that it would be cheaper for Greatorex's direct-labour force to build it. The R.P.A. group nevertheless pressed for a share at least in the work: so it was divided. This was unsatisfactory technically. It also showed the inconsistency in the R.P.A.'s attitude; like William Browett in the 1840s, they worked sometimes in the interests of ratepayers, and sometimes in those of tradesmen. The question of the accounts, about which they protested so much, showed that it cost money to save it, and to make the city's government efficient. The treasurer, a banker serving the corporation part-time, paid the cheques. The accounts were drawn up by Lawrence, who was also keeper of St. Mary's Hall and superintendent of the rate-collectors. He had no proper training in book-keeping, and no time to do more than go through all the receipts and payment slips once a year and draw up the accounts: hence their tardy appearance and confused form.

At the end of 1858, not surprisingly, a deficiency of £229 was discovered. Lawrence's honesty was not in question. Even the frugally minded had to agree that an accountant clerk, at £150 a year, would be an economy. One was appointed.(1)

But the proposal later in 1859 to pay Greatorex an addition of £50 to his salary of £200 both offended against the faith of the R.P.A. and joined its inconsistencies together in common opposition. Charles Dresser, liberal doyen of the General Works Committee, presented the proposal as an act of justice to a hardworking and talented public servant: 'it was largely due to him that Coventry was not now behind any town in England - it used to be behind them all'.(2) Councillor Davis, enraged that it should be suggested that a man who did not have to be attracted to the job - who had shown no disposition to resign - and who was responsible for taking work out of the hands of local carpenters and bricklayers, retorted: 'Monster of a serpent that Mr. Dresser is, he will find that he has got no sting. I am sent here by the Ratepayers.'(3) The proposal was however carried in the committee - William Taunton being convinced by Dresser's arguments and voting for the motion: 'though he was going before his constituents, that had not the slightest weight with him'. (4) The next municipal elections were keenly fought on the issue - R.P.A. candidates, both liberal and Tory, winning seats. Taunton was defeated because of his vote. 'On this question of the surveyor's salary the public voice has been emphatic, trumpet-tongued - "Away with the increase".'(5) The galleries were crowded at the next meeting of the town council. Cheers from the public greeted Councillor Eaves's denunciation of the plan to place on the backs of poor weavers an additional burden. At the crucial vote for rescinding fifteen voted on each side; party groups were split - Eld and Dresser voting for the increase, Lynes and Edward Goode against. The R.P.A. men expected victory, since their idol, William Wilmot, was mayor - their pressure having been partly responsible for his being given that civic honour, so long desired. But Wilmot's

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(1) For this section, see Coventry Standard, 22 February 1856, 10 January, 13 February, 20 November 1857, 26 February, 12 March, 13 August, 20 August, 5 November, 19 November, 24 December, 31 December 1858, 21 January, 5 August 1859.

(2) ibid., 30 September 1859.

(3) loc. cit.

(4) loc. cit.

(5) ibid., 4 November 1859.

mental faculties were waning: misunderstanding the motion, he voted the wrong way.(1)

One year later the issue was brought up again. Apparently for the first time ever, all thirty-six councillors and aldermen were present. The mayor, Henry Soden, asked the ratepayers who crowded the public galleries not to commit any 'commotion, or terror, or interference with discussion'.(2) The debate in fact was the most acrimonious since the days of Abel Rotherham - councillors abusing each other for hours. Once again the council was split exactly. The mayor gave his casting vote to continue the increase. There the matter rested:(3) but the controversy shows how powerful, in early Victorian Coventry, could be the feeling that the council should serve the desire of the ratepayers for economy and of tradesmen for contracts.

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(1) ibid., 11 November 1859.

(2) ibid., 16 November 1860.

(3) loc. cit.

APPENDIX THREE

A note on Edward Gulson

Although Edward Gulson was one of the first four assistant commissioners to be appointed by the Poor Law Commission in October 1834,(1) very little has been discovered about his early life, especially before he became a director of the poor in Coventry.(2) Gulson's career as a director of the poor in Coventry was doubtless the reason for his being appointed an assistant commissioner; his work may have been known to George Nicholls, manager of the Birmingham branch of the Bank of England in the early 1830s and from 1834 onwards one of the three poor law commissioners. From his appointment, Gulson was a keen supporter of Chadwick's stringent ideas on poor law administration, entering into his work of forming poor law unions with eagerness and writing to Chadwick in terms of friendly familiarity. In 1837 he pressed Chadwick to enter parliament, offering to use his influence with Earl Fitzwilliam for one of his seats and to pay some of Chadwick's expenses.(3)

In 1841 Gulson, given the hard task of introducing the poor law into Ireland, was considered briefly for the commissionership

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(1) See Chapter Nine, section I.

(2) No material on Gulson has been discovered in Coventry City Library or the City Record Office. Nor does he appear in the D.N.B. or (as far as can be told) in any similar work, contemporary or modern. In the standard histories of the poor law he is a name merely - the Webbs, English Poor Law History: The Last Hundred Years (London, 1929) and T. Mackay, A History of the English Poor Law, iii (London, 1898, repr. 1967), saying far less about him than about his colleagues. The most detailed study of the government inspectorate, David Roberts, Victorian Origins of the British Welfare State (New Haven, 1960) also merely mentions him in passing.

(3) University College, London: Chadwick Papers, Gulson to Chadwick, c. December 1834, 26 February 1835, 18 June 1835, July 1837 (three letters).

vacant because of Shaw-Lefevre's resignation but rejected 'on account of his manner'.(1) In 1847 Gulson was one of Chadwick's chief supporters in the Andover enquiry: 'you have no friend who experienced greater or more sincere pleasure than I did in seeing the ungenerous and unfair attack made upon you so well rebutted'.(2) After Chadwick's retirement from poor law affairs Gulson continued to write to him, chiefly in lamentation at the Poor Law Board's current departure from the rigour of earlier days,

> when I felt that we were all in one mind and labouring together in earnest, guided by the same principle, towards the public good ... I have become heartsick. The times are such as to reduce pauperism in spite of all the unwise relaxations which are daily occurring; but ... the day will surely come when the course now followed, must be regretted and condemned.(3)

In the 1860s Gulson was even more disgusted at the greater leniency of central authority. 'Such laxity and falling off in first principles of administration have of late years been permitted.'(4) 'The country has to thank the Poor Law Board for the increase in pauperism and vagrancy': Gulson's sense of disappointment at this laxity had hastened his retirement.(5)

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(1) S.E. Finer, The Life and Times of Sir Edwin Chadwick (London, 1952), p. 203. See also Chadwick Papers, Gulson to Chadwick, 29 May 1841.

(2) Chadwick Papers, Gulson to Chadwick, 20 June 1847. See also S.E. Finer, op. cit., pp. 271 et seq.

(3) Chadwick Papers, Gulson to Chadwick, 13 January 1852.

(4) ibid., Gulson to Chadwick, 5 September 1867.

(5) ibid., Gulson to Chadwick, 9 May 1871.

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Neither the remote nor the recent past has been kind to historians of Coventry. The corporation neglected its official records until very recently: one of the leading characters in this thesis, John Carter, valued them greatly - but as enrichments of his personal collection of antiquities, rather than of the city he served. When dismissed in 1836 he took many of the most ancient documents with him. Some were not returned until this century. Much of the material in the muniment room was until the late 1960s piled in confusion in boxes whose contents were not apparently known to anyone, and certainly not catalogued: it was in searching through such a box in 1963 that I discovered the letters of John Carter. Fortunately, a thorough spring clean has in recent years occurred, and a proper catalogue is at last in progress; its completion is eagerly awaited.

The fate of non-official material has however been even more unfortunate. When the Gulson Central Library was bombed in 1940 an extremely large mass of local material was lost, including thirty volumes collected by William Reader, the great nineteenth-century antiquarian, almost complete runs of all the city's newspapers, and a large number of pamphlets of local concern. Unfortunately much of this material was irreplaceable either locally or elsewhere; for example, the British Museum Newspaper Library's holdings (which have necessarily been relied upon for the great majority of the Coventry newspapers referred to for this thesis) are vestigial for the period before 1824. More serious still was the loss through bombing of many incomparably valuable business papers. Destroyed, for example, were the entire records of Cash's, the ribbon manufacturers, and of Rotherham's, the watch manufacturers. Search and enquiry in recent years in the city have failed to reveal any business records for the Victorian period.

It is therefore sadly ironic that the only historian of the ribbon industry who did have the opportunity to lay under contribution the material now lost, Horace Miles, chose not to do so, and instead relief for his thesis almost entirely on material fortunately

accessible to all still - the parliamentary papers, though even these he did not exploit at all thoroughly.

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[1439] H.C. (1852) xxi (April-October 1851)
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